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## Preface

### About OpenStax

OpenStax is a non-profit organization committed to improving student access to quality learning materials. Our free textbooks are developed and peer-reviewed by educators to ensure they are readable, accurate, and meet the scope and sequence requirements of modern college courses. Unlike traditional textbooks, OpenStax resources live online and are owned by the community of educators using them. Through our partnerships with companies and foundations committed to reducing costs for students, OpenStax is working to improve access to higher education for all. OpenStax is an initiative of Rice University and is made possible through the generous support of several philanthropic foundations.

### About This Book

Welcome to *Introduction to Sociology 2e*, an OpenStax resource created with several goals in mind: accessibility, affordability, customization, and student engagement—all while encouraging learners toward high levels of learning. Instructors and students alike will find that this textbook offers a strong foundation in sociology. It is available for free online and in low-cost print and e-book editions.

To broaden access and encourage community curation, *Introduction to Sociology 2e* is “open source” licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license. Everyone is invited to submit examples, emerging research, and other feedback to enhance and strengthen the material and keep it current and relevant for today’s students. You can make suggestions by contacting us at [Support@OpenStax.org](mailto:Support@OpenStax.org).

### To the Student

This book is written for you and is based on the teaching and research experience of numerous sociologists. In today’s global socially networked world, the topic of sociology is more relevant than ever before. We hope

that through this book, you will learn how simple, everyday human actions and interactions can change the world. In this book, you will find applications of sociology concepts that are relevant, current, and balanced.

## **To the Instructor**

This text is intended for a one-semester introductory course. Since current events influence our social perspectives and the field of sociology in general, OpenStax encourages instructors to keep this book fresh by sending in your up-to-date examples to [Support@OpenStax.org](mailto:Support@OpenStax.org) so that students and instructors around the country can relate and engage in fruitful discussions.

## **General Approach**

*Introduction to Sociology 2e* adheres to the scope and sequence of a typical introductory sociology course. In addition to comprehensive coverage of core concepts, foundational scholars, and emerging theories we have incorporated section reviews with engaging questions, discussions that help students apply the sociological imagination, and features that draw learners into the discipline in meaningful ways. Although this text can be modified and reorganized to suit your needs, the standard version is organized so that topics are introduced conceptually, with relevant, everyday experiences.

## **Changes to the Second Edition**

Part of the mission of the second edition update was to ensure the research, examples and concepts used in this textbook are current and relevant to today's student. To this end, we have rewritten the introduction of each chapter to reflect the latest developments in sociology, history and global culture. In addition to new graphs and images, the reader of the second edition will find new feature boxes on a diverse array of topics, which has been one of the goals of the update—bringing the world into greater focus through case studies on global culture.

For instance, since the first edition there have been major cultural shifts within the Middle East and Arab world—a movement still underway called the Arab Spring—changes that are now incorporated into our coverage on social movements and social unrest (Chapter 21, “Social Movements and Social Change”). New issues in immigration, in the United States and across the world, have been brought to the forefront of the second edition, as rising income gaps and modern transportation are responsible for trends in Europe (fears of Islamic conservatism and economic recession) and political debates in the U.S. (such as border security, universal education and health care).

Since the first edition in 2012, technology and social media has ushered in new forms of communication, and, of course, these changes are altering the fabric of social life around the world. The benefits and downfalls of new technologies are reflected in new material in Chapter 4, “Society and Social Interaction,” where we discuss how social media is changing classical models of social stratification and prestige.

In addition to updating critical facts, data, and policies from the first edition, we have expanded on essential topics, including:

Feminism and feminist theory	Health care legislation
US social stratification	Minimum wage policies
Transgender issues and changes to the DSM-V	Global statistics on education
Marriage and pay equality	Competing theories of tolerance
The use of charter schools	Cyberbullying

Impact of economy on population segments	Climate change debates
Use of technology and social media by	Global population and demographic shifts
individuals and groups	Net neutrality, online privacy and security

Other topics received a light update for relevance and student engagement. The racial tensions that have come about through the cases of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, as well as the legalization of marijuana are two examples of such additions.

## Features of OpenStax Introduction to Sociology 2e

We have retained and updated the special features of the original text for this updated version.

### Modularity

This textbook is organized on Connexions (<http://cnx.org>) as a collection of modules that can be rearranged and modified to suit the needs of a particular professor or class. That being said, modules often contain references to content in other modules, as most topics in sociology cannot be discussed in isolation.

### Learning Objectives

Every module begins with a set of clear and concise learning objectives. These objectives are designed to help the instructor decide what content to include or assign, and to guide the student with respect to what he or she can expect to learn. After completing the module and end-of-module

exercises, students should be able to demonstrate mastery of the learning objectives.

## Key Features

The following features show students the dynamic nature of sociology:

**Sociological Research:** Highlights specific current and relevant research studies. Examples include “Is Music a Cultural Universal?” and “Deceptive Divorce Rates.”

**Sociology in the Real World:** Ties chapter content to student life and discusses sociology in terms of the everyday. Topics include “Secrets of the McJob” and “Grade Inflation: When Is an A Really a C?”

**Big Picture:** Features present sociological concepts at a national or international level, including “Education in Afghanistan” and “American Indian Tribes and Environmental Racism.”

**Case Study:** Describes real-life people whose experiences relate to chapter content, such as “Catherine Middleton: The Commoner Who Would Be Queen.”

**Social Policy and Debate:** Discusses political issues that relate to chapter content, such as “The Legalese of Sex and Gender” and “Is the U.S. Bilingual?”

**Careers in Sociology:** Explores the lives and work of those in careers in sociology, including the real-world issues and debates these professionals encounter on a daily basis.

## Section Summaries

Section summaries distill the information in each section for both students and instructors down to key, concise points addressed in the section.

## Key Terms

Key terms are bold and are followed by a definition in context. Definitions of key terms are also listed in the Glossary, which appears at the end of the module online and at the end of the chapter in print.

## **Section Quizzes**

Section quizzes provide opportunities to apply and test the information students learn throughout each section. Both multiple-choice and short-response questions feature a variety of question types and range of difficulty.

## **Further Research**

This feature helps students further explore the section topic and offers related research topics that could be explored.

## **Acknowledgements**

*Introduction to Sociology* is based on the work of numerous professors, writers, editors, and reviewers who are able to bring topics to students in the most engaging way.

We would like to thank all those listed below as well as many others who have contributed their time and energy to review and provide feedback on the manuscript. Especially Clint Lalonde and team at BC Campus for sharing the updates they made for use in this edition, and the team at Stark State College for their editorial support in this update. Their input has been critical in maintaining the pedagogical integrity and accuracy of the text.

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## **Supplements**

Accompanying the main text is an [Instructor's PowerPoint](#) file, which includes all of the images and captions found throughout the text and an Instructor's test bank.

## **Disclaimer**

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## Introduction to Sociology class="introduction"

Sociologists  
study how  
society affects  
people and  
how people  
affect society.

(Photo  
courtesy of  
Diego Torres  
Silvestre/flickr  
)



We all belong to many groups; you're a member of your sociology class, and you're a member of your family; you may belong to a political party, sports team, or the crowd watching a sporting event; you're a citizen of your country, and you're a part of a generation. You may have a somewhat different role in each group and feel differently in each.

Groups vary in their sizes and formalities, as well as in the levels of attachment between group members, among other things. Within a large group, smaller groups may exist, and each group may behave differently.

At a rock concert, for example, some may enjoy singing along, others prefer to sit and observe, while still others may join in a mosh pit or try crowd surfing. Why do we feel and act differently in different types of social situations? Why might people of a single group exhibit different behaviors in the same situation? Why might people acting similarly not feel connected to others exhibiting the same behavior? These are some of the many questions sociologists ask as they study people and societies.

## What Is Sociology?

- Explain concepts central to sociology
- Understand how different sociological perspectives have developed



Sociologists learn about society as a whole while studying one-to-one and group interactions. (Photo courtesy of Gareth Williams/flickr)

## What Are Society and Culture?

**Sociology** is the study of groups and group interactions, societies and social interactions, from small and personal groups to very large groups. A group of people who live in a defined geographic area, who interact with one another, and who share a common culture is what sociologists call a **society**. Sociologists study all aspects and levels of society. Sociologists working from the **micro-level** study small groups and individual interactions, while those using **macro-level** analysis look at trends among and between large groups and societies. For example, a micro-level study might look at the accepted rules of conversation in various groups such as among teenagers or business professionals. In contrast, a macro-level analysis might research the ways that language use has changed over time or in social media outlets.

The term **culture** refers to the group's shared practices, values, and beliefs. Culture encompasses a group's way of life, from routine, everyday interactions to the most important parts of group members' lives. It includes everything produced by a society, including all of the social rules. Sociologists often study culture using the **sociological imagination**, which pioneer sociologist C. Wright Mills described as an awareness of the relationship between a person's behavior and experience and the wider culture that shaped the person's choices and perceptions. It's a way of seeing our own and other people's behavior in relationship to history and social structure (1959).

One illustration of this is a person's decision to marry. In the United States, this choice is heavily influenced by individual feelings; however, the social acceptability of marriage relative to the person's circumstances also plays a part. Remember, though, that culture is a product of the people in a society; sociologists take care not to treat the concept of "culture" as though it were alive in its own right. **Reification** is an error of treating an abstract concept as though it has a real, material existence (Sahn 2013).

## **Studying Patterns: How Sociologists View Society**

All sociologists are interested in the experiences of individuals and how those experiences are shaped by interactions with social groups and society as a whole. To a sociologist, the personal decisions an individual makes do not exist in a vacuum. Cultural patterns and social forces put pressure on people to select one choice over another. Sociologists try to identify these general patterns by examining the behavior of large groups of people living in the same society and experiencing the same societal pressures.

Changes in the U.S. family structure offer an example of patterns that sociologists are interested in studying. A "typical" family now is vastly different than in past decades when most U.S. families consisted of married parents living in a home with their unmarried children. The percent of unmarried couples, same-sex couples, single-parent and single-adult households is increasing, as well as is the number of expanded households, in which extended family members such as grandparents, cousins, or adult children live together in the family home (U.S. Census Bureau 2013).

While mothers still make up the majority of single parents, millions of fathers are also raising their children alone, and more than 1 million of these single fathers have never been married (Williams Institute 2010; cited in Ludden 2012). Increasingly,

single men and women and cohabitating opposite-sex or same-sex couples are choosing to raise children outside of marriage through surrogates or adoption.

Some sociologists study **social facts**, which are the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life, that may contribute to these changes in the family. Do people in the United States view marriage and family differently than before? Do employment and economic conditions play a role? How has culture influenced the choices that individuals make in living arrangements? Other sociologists are studying the consequences of these new patterns, such as the ways children are affected by them or changing needs for education, housing, and healthcare.



Modern U.S. families may be very different in structure from what was historically typical. (Photo courtesy of Tony Alter/Wikimedia Commons)

Another example of the way society influences individual decisions can be seen in people's opinions about and use of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP benefits. Some people believe those who receive SNAP benefits are lazy and unmotivated. Statistics from the United States Department of Agriculture show a complex picture.

State	Population	Number Receiving SNAP	Percentage of residents receiving SNAP	Average Weekly Earnings
District of Columbia	601,723	135,796	22.6%	\$1,667.00
Florida	18,801,310	3,664,055	19.5%	\$852.00
Rhode Island	1,052,567	172,343	16.4%	\$919.00
Ohio	11,536,504	1,627,589	14.1%	\$878.00
Massachusetts	6,547,629	787,411	12.0%	\$1,197.00
New Jersey	8,791,894	887,259	10.1%	\$1,116.00
Wyoming	563,626	34,167	6.1%	\$866.00
		National Average:	14.5%	\$974.00

**SNAP Use by State in 2005** Sociologists examine social conditions in different states to explain differences in the number of people receiving SNAP benefits. (Sources:

U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Census Bureau, Food Research and Action Center, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)

The percentage of the population receiving SNAP benefits is much higher in certain states than in others. Does this mean, if the stereotype above were applied, that people in some states are lazier and less motivated than those in other states? Sociologists study the economies in each state—comparing unemployment rates, food, energy costs, and other factors—to explain differences in social issues like this.

To identify social trends, sociologists also study how people use SNAP benefits and how people react to their use. Research has found that for many people from all classes, there is a strong stigma attached to the use of SNAP benefits. This stigma can prevent people who qualify for this type of assistance from using SNAP benefits. According to Hanson and Gundersen (2002), how strongly this stigma is felt is linked to the general economic climate. This illustrates how sociologists observe a pattern in society.

Sociologists identify and study patterns related to all kinds of contemporary social issues. The “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, the emergence of the Tea Party as a political faction, how Twitter has influenced everyday communication—these are all examples of topics that sociologists might explore.

## **Studying Part and Whole: How Sociologists View Social Structures**

A key basis of the sociological perspective is the concept that the individual and society are inseparable. It is impossible to study one without the other. German sociologist Norbert Elias called the process of simultaneously analyzing the behavior of individuals and the society that shapes that behavior **figuration**.

An application that makes this concept understandable is the practice of religion. While people experience their religions in a distinctly individual manner, religion exists in a larger social context. For instance, an individual’s religious practice may be influenced by what government dictates, holidays, teachers, places of worship, rituals, and so on. These influences underscore the important relationship between individual practices of religion and social pressures that influence that religious experience (Elias 1978).

### **Note:**

Individual-Society Connections



When sociologist Nathan Kierns spoke to his friend Ashley (a pseudonym) about the move she and her partner had made from an urban center to a small Midwestern town, he was curious about how the social pressures placed on a lesbian couple differed from one community to the other. Ashley said that in the city they had been accustomed to getting looks and hearing comments when she and her partner walked hand in hand. Otherwise, she felt that they were at least being tolerated. There had been little to no outright discrimination.

Things changed when they moved to the small town for her partner's job. For the first time, Ashley found herself experiencing direct discrimination because of her sexual orientation. Some of it was particularly hurtful. Landlords would not rent to them. Ashley, who is a highly trained professional, had a great deal of difficulty finding a new job.

When Nathan asked Ashley if she and her partner became discouraged or bitter about this new situation, Ashley said that rather than letting it get to them, they decided to do something about it. Ashley approached groups at a local college and several churches in the area. Together they decided to form the town's first gay-straight alliance.

The alliance has worked successfully to educate their community about same-sex couples. It also worked to raise awareness about the kinds of discrimination that Ashley and her partner experienced in the town and how those could be eliminated. The alliance has become a strong advocacy group, and it is working to attain equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, or LBGT individuals.

Kierns observed that this is an excellent example of how negative social forces can result in a positive response from individuals to bring about social change (Kierns 2011).

## Summary

Sociology is the systematic study of society and social interaction. In order to carry out their studies, sociologists identify cultural patterns and social forces and determine how they affect individuals and groups. They also develop ways to apply their findings to the real world.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Which of the following best describes sociology as a subject?

- a. The study of individual behavior
- b. The study of cultures
- c. The study of society and social interaction
- d. The study of economics

---

**Solution:**  
**Answers**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

C. Wright Mills once said that sociologists need to develop a sociological \_\_\_\_\_ to study how society affects individuals.

- a. culture
- b. imagination
- c. method
- d. tool

---

**Solution:**  
**Answers**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

A sociologist defines society as a group of people who reside in a defined area, share a culture, and who:

- a. interact
- b. work in the same industry
- c. speak different languages
- d. practice a recognized religion

---

**Solution:**  
**Answers**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Seeing patterns means that a sociologist needs to be able to:

- a. compare the behavior of individuals from different societies
- b. compare one society to another
- c. identify similarities in how social groups respond to social pressure
- d. compare individuals to groups

---

**Solution:**

**Answers**

C

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What do you think C. Wright Mills meant when he said that to be a sociologist, one had to develop a sociological imagination?

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Describe a situation in which a choice you made was influenced by societal pressures.

**Further Research**

Sociology is a broad discipline. Different kinds of sociologists employ various methods for exploring the relationship between individuals and society. Check out more about sociology at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/what-is-sociology>.

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## **Glossary**

### **culture**

a group's shared practices, values, and beliefs

### **figuration**

the process of simultaneously analyzing the behavior of an individual and the society that shapes that behavior

### **reification**

an error of treating an abstract concept as though it has a real, material existence

### **society**

a group of people who live in a defined geographical area who interact with one another and who share a common culture

### **sociological imagination**

the ability to understand how your own past relates to that of other people, as well as to history in general and societal structures in particular

### **sociology**

the systematic study of society and social interaction

## The History of Sociology

- Explain why sociology emerged when it did
- Describe how sociology became a separate academic discipline



People have been thinking like sociologists long before sociology became a separate academic discipline: Plato and Aristotle, Confucius, Khaldun, and Voltaire all set the stage for modern sociology. (Photos (a),(b),(d) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; Photo (c) courtesy of Moumou82/Wikimedia Commons)

Since ancient times, people have been fascinated by the relationship between individuals and the societies to which they belong. Many topics studied in modern sociology were also studied by ancient philosophers in their desire to describe an ideal society, including theories of social conflict, economics, social cohesion, and power (Hannoum 2003).

In the thirteenth century, Ma Tuan-Lin, a Chinese historian, first recognized social dynamics as an underlying component of historical development in his seminal encyclopedia, *General Study of Literary Remains*. The next century saw the emergence of the historian some consider to be the world's first sociologist: Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) of Tunisia. He wrote about many topics of interest today, setting a foundation for both modern sociology and economics, including a theory of social conflict, a comparison of nomadic and sedentary life, a description of political

economy, and a study connecting a tribe's social cohesion to its capacity for power (Hannoum 2003).

In the eighteenth century, Age of Enlightenment philosophers developed general principles that could be used to explain social life. Thinkers such as John Locke, Voltaire, Immanuel Kant, and Thomas Hobbes responded to what they saw as social ills by writing on topics that they hoped would lead to social reform. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) wrote about women's conditions in society. Her works were long ignored by the male academic structure, but since the 1970s, Wollstonecraft has been widely considered the first feminist thinker of consequence.

The early nineteenth century saw great changes with the Industrial Revolution, increased mobility, and new kinds of employment. It was also a time of great social and political upheaval with the rise of empires that exposed many people—for the first time—to societies and cultures other than their own. Millions of people moved into cities and many people turned away from their traditional religious beliefs.

## **Creating a Discipline**

**Auguste Comte (1798–1857)**



Auguste

Comte  
played an  
important  
role in the  
development  
of sociology  
as a  
recognized  
discipline.  
(Photo  
courtesy of  
Wikimedia  
Commons)

The term sociology was first coined in 1780 by the French essayist Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836) in an unpublished manuscript (Fauré et al. 1999). In 1838, the term was reinvented by Auguste Comte (1798–1857). Comte originally studied to be an engineer, but later became a pupil of social philosopher Claude Henri de Rouvroy Comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825). They both thought that social scientists could study society using the same scientific methods utilized in natural sciences. Comte also believed in the potential of social scientists to work toward the betterment of society. He held that once scholars identified the laws that governed society, sociologists could address problems such as poor education and poverty (Abercrombie et al. 2000).

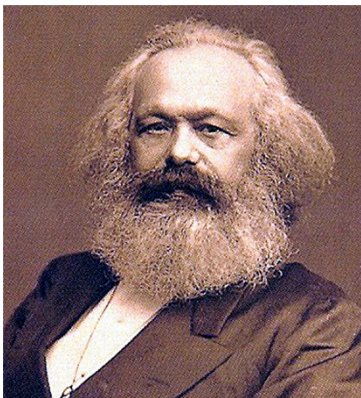
Comte named the scientific study of social patterns **positivism**. He described his philosophy in a series of books called *The Course in Positive Philosophy* (1830–1842) and *A General View of Positivism* (1848). He believed that using scientific methods to reveal the laws by which societies and individuals interact would usher in a new “positivist” age of history. While the field and its terminology have grown, sociologists still believe in the positive impact of their work.

## **Harriet Martineau (1802–1876)—the First Woman Sociologist**

Harriet Martineau was a writer who addressed a wide range of social science issues. She was an early observer of social practices, including economics, social class, religion, suicide, government, and women's rights. Her writing career began in 1832 with a series of stories titled *Illustrations of Political Economy*, in which she tried to educate ordinary people about the principles of economics (Johnson 2003).

Martineau was the first to translate Comte's writing from French to English and thereby introduced sociology to English-speaking scholars (Hill 1991). She is also credited with the first systematic methodological international comparisons of social institutions in two of her most famous sociological works: *Society in America* (1837) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838). Martineau found the workings of capitalism at odds with the professed moral principles of people in the United States; she pointed out the faults with the free enterprise system in which workers were exploited and impoverished while business owners became wealthy. She further noted that the belief in all being created equal was inconsistent with the lack of women's rights. Much like Mary Wollstonecraft, Martineau was often discounted in her own time by the male domination of academic sociology.

## **Karl Marx (1818–1883)**





Karl Marx was  
one of the  
founders of  
sociology. His  
ideas about social  
conflict are still  
relevant today.  
(Photo courtesy of  
John  
Mayall/Wikimedi  
a Commons)

Karl Marx (1818–1883) was a German philosopher and economist. In 1848 he and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) coauthored the *Communist Manifesto*. This book is one of the most influential political manuscripts in history. It also presents Marx's theory of society, which differed from what Comte proposed.

Marx rejected Comte's positivism. He believed that societies grew and changed as a result of the struggles of different social classes over the means of production. At the time he was developing his theories, the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism led to great disparities in wealth between the owners of the factories and workers. Capitalism, an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of goods and the means to produce them, grew in many nations.

Marx predicted that inequalities of capitalism would become so extreme that workers would eventually revolt. This would lead to the collapse of capitalism, which would be replaced by communism. Communism is an economic system under which there is no private or corporate ownership: everything is owned communally and distributed as needed. Marx believed that communism was a more equitable system than capitalism.

While his economic predictions may not have come true in the time frame he predicted, Marx's idea that social conflict leads to change in society is

still one of the major theories used in modern sociology.

### **Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)**

In 1873, the English philosopher Herbert Spencer published *The Study of Sociology*, the first book with the term “sociology” in the title. Spencer rejected much of Comte’s philosophy as well as Marx’s theory of class struggle and his support of communism. Instead, he favored a form of government that allowed market forces to control capitalism. His work influenced many early sociologists including Émile Durkheim (1858–1917).

### **Georg Simmel (1858–1918)**

Georg Simmel was a German art critic who wrote widely on social and political issues as well. Simmel took an anti-positivism stance and addressed topics such as social conflict, the function of money, individual identity in city life, and the European fear of outsiders (Stapley 2010). Much of his work focused on the micro-level theories, and it analyzed the dynamics of two-person and three-person groups. His work also emphasized individual culture as the creative capacities of individuals. Simmel’s contributions to sociology are not often included in academic histories of the discipline, perhaps overshadowed by his contemporaries Durkheim, Mead, and Weber (Ritzer and Goodman 2004).

### **Émile Durkheim (1858–1917)**

Durkheim helped establish sociology as a formal academic discipline by establishing the first European department of sociology at the University of Bordeaux in 1895 and by publishing his *Rules of the Sociological Method* in 1895. In another important work, *Division of Labour in Society* (1893), Durkheim laid out his theory on how societies transformed from a primitive

state into a capitalist, industrial society. According to Durkheim, people rise to their proper levels in society based on belief in a meritocracy.

Durkheim believed that sociologists could study objective “social facts” (Poggi 2000). He also believed that through such studies it would be possible to determine if a society was “healthy” or “pathological.” He saw healthy societies as stable, while pathological societies experienced a breakdown in social norms between individuals and society.

In 1897, Durkheim attempted to demonstrate the effectiveness of his rules of social research when he published a work titled *Suicide*. Durkheim examined suicide statistics in different police districts to research differences between Catholic and Protestant communities. He attributed the differences to socioreligious forces rather than to individual or psychological causes.

### **George Herbert Mead (1863–1931)**

George Herbert Mead was a philosopher and sociologist whose work focused on the ways in which the mind and the self were developed as a result of social processes (Cronk n.d.). He argued that how an individual comes to view himself or herself is based to a very large extent on interactions with others. Mead called specific individuals that impacted a person’s life **significant others**, and he also conceptualized “**generalized others**” as the organized and generalized attitude of a social group. Mead’s work is closely associated with the symbolic interactionist approach and emphasizes the micro-level of analysis.

### **Max Weber (1864–1920)**

Prominent sociologist Max Weber established a sociology department in Germany at the Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich in 1919. Weber wrote on many topics related to sociology including political change in Russia and social forces that affect factory workers. He is known best for

his 1904 book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The theory that Weber sets forth in this book is still controversial. Some believe that Weber argued that the beliefs of many Protestants, especially Calvinists, led to the creation of capitalism. Others interpret it as simply claiming that the ideologies of capitalism and Protestantism are complementary.

Weber believed that it was difficult, if not impossible, to use standard scientific methods to accurately predict the behavior of groups as people hoped to do. They argued that the influence of culture on human behavior had to be taken into account. This even applied to the researchers themselves, who, they believed, should be aware of how their own cultural biases could influence their research. To deal with this problem, Weber and Dilthey introduced the concept of *verstehen*, a German word that means to understand in a deep way. In seeking *verstehen*, outside observers of a social world—an entire culture or a small setting—attempt to understand it from an insider's point of view.

In his book *The Nature of Social Action* (1922), Weber described sociology as striving to "interpret the meaning of social action and thereby give a causal explanation of the way in which action proceeds and the effects it produces." He and other like-minded sociologists proposed a philosophy of **antipositivism** whereby social researchers would strive for subjectivity as they worked to represent social processes, cultural norms, and societal values. This approach led to some research methods whose aim was not to generalize or predict (traditional in science), but to systematically gain an in-depth understanding of social worlds.

The different approaches to research based on positivism or antipositivism are often considered the foundation for the differences found today between quantitative sociology and qualitative sociology. **Quantitative sociology** uses statistical methods such as surveys with large numbers of participants. Researchers analyze data using statistical techniques to see if they can uncover patterns of human behavior. **Qualitative sociology** seeks to understand human behavior by learning about it through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and analysis of content sources (like books, magazines, journals, and popular media).

**Note:****Should We Raise the Minimum Wage?**

In the 2014 State of the Union Address, President Obama called on Congress to raise the national minimum wage, and he signed an executive order putting this into effect for individuals working on new federal service contracts. Congress did not pass legislation to change the national minimum wage more broadly. The result has become a national controversy, with various economists taking different sides on the issue, and public protests being staged by several groups of minimum-wage workers.

Opponents of raising the minimum wage argue that some workers would get larger paychecks while others would lose their jobs, and companies would be less likely to hire new workers because of the increased cost of paying them (Bernstein 2014; cited in CNN).

Proponents of raising the minimum wage contend that some job loss would be greatly offset by the positive effects on the economy of low-wage workers having more income (Hassett 2014; cited in CNN).

Sociologists may consider the minimum wage issue from differing perspectives as well. How much of an impact would a minimum wage raise have for a single mother? Some might study the economic effects, such as her ability to pay bills and keep food on the table. Others might look at how reduced economic stress could improve family relationships. Some sociologists might research the impact on the status of small business owners. These could all be examples of public sociology, a branch of sociology that strives to bring sociological dialogue to public forums. The goals of public sociology are to increase understanding of the social factors that underlie social problems and assist in finding solutions. According to Michael Burawoy (2005), the challenge of public sociology is to engage multiple publics in multiple ways.

**Summary**

Sociology was developed as a way to study and try to understand the changes to society brought on by the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of the earliest sociologists thought that

societies and individuals' roles in society could be studied using the same scientific methodologies that were used in the natural sciences, while others believed that it was impossible to predict human behavior scientifically, and still others debated the value of such predictions. Those perspectives continue to be represented within sociology today.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Which of the following was a topic of study in early sociology?

- a. Astrology
- b. Economics
- c. Physics
- d. History

---

#### Solution:

#### Answers

B

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Which founder of sociology believed societies changed due to class struggle?

- a. Émile Comte
- b. Karl Marx
- c. Plato
- d. Herbert Spencer

---

#### Solution:

## **Answers**

B

### **Exercise:**

#### **Problem:**

The difference between positivism and antipositivism relates to:

- a. whether individuals like or dislike their society
- b. whether research methods use statistical data or person-to-person research
- c. whether sociological studies can predict or improve society
- d. all of the above

---

#### **Solution:**

#### **Answers**

C

### **Exercise:**

**Problem:** Which would a quantitative sociologists use to gather data?

- a. A large survey
- b. A literature search
- c. An in-depth interview
- d. A review of television programs

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#### **Solution:**

#### **Answers**

A

### **Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Weber believed humans could not be studied purely objectively because they were influenced by:

- a. drugs
- b. their culture
- c. their genetic makeup
- d. the researcher

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**Solution:****Answers**

B

**Short Answer****Exercise:****Problem:**

What do you make of Karl Marx's contributions to sociology? What perceptions of Marx have you been exposed to in your society, and how do those perceptions influence your views?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Do you tend to place more value on qualitative or quantitative research? Why? Does it matter what topic you are studying?

**Further Research**

Many sociologists helped shape the discipline. To learn more about prominent sociologists and how they changed sociology check out <http://www.macionis.com/gallery-of-sociologists/ferdinand-toennies/>.



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## Glossary

### antipositivism

the view that social researchers should strive for subjectivity as they worked to represent social processes, cultural norms, and societal values

### generalized others

the organized and generalized attitude of a social group

### positivism

the scientific study of social patterns

### qualitative sociology

in-depth interviews, focus groups, and/or analysis of content sources as the source of its data

### quantitative sociology

statistical methods such as surveys with large numbers of participants

### significant others

specific individuals that impact a person's life

verstehen

a German word that means to understand in a deep way

## Theoretical Perspectives

- Explain what sociological theories are and how they are used
- Understand the similarities and differences between structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism



Sociologists develop theories to explain social occurrences such as protest rallies. (Photo courtesy of [voanews.com/Wikimedia Commons](https://www.voanews.com/WikimediaCommons))

Sociologists study social events, interactions, and patterns, and they develop a theory in an attempt to explain why things work as they do. In sociology, a **theory** is a way to explain different aspects of social interactions and to create a testable proposition, called a **hypothesis**, about society (Allan 2006).

For example, although suicide is generally considered an individual phenomenon, Émile Durkheim was interested in studying the social factors that affect it. He studied social ties within a group, or **social solidarity**, and hypothesized that differences in suicide rates might be explained by religion-based differences. Durkheim gathered a large amount of data about Europeans who had ended their lives, and he did indeed find differences

based on religion. Protestants were more likely to commit suicide than Catholics in Durkheim's society, and his work supports the utility of theory in sociological research.

Theories vary in scope depending on the scale of the issues that they are meant to explain. Macro-level theories relate to large-scale issues and large groups of people, while micro-level theories look at very specific relationships between individuals or small groups. **Grand theories** attempt to explain large-scale relationships and answer fundamental questions such as why societies form and why they change. Sociological theory is constantly evolving and should never be considered complete. Classic sociological theories are still considered important and current, but new sociological theories build upon the work of their predecessors and add to them (Calhoun 2002).

In sociology, a few theories provide broad perspectives that help explain many different aspects of social life, and these are called paradigms. **Paradigms** are philosophical and theoretical frameworks used within a discipline to formulate theories, generalizations, and the experiments performed in support of them. Three paradigms have come to dominate sociological thinking, because they provide useful explanations: structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

Sociological Paradigm	Level of Analysis	Focus
Structural Functionalism	Macro or mid	The way each part of society functions together to contribute to the whole

Sociological Paradigm	Level of Analysis	Focus
Conflict Theory	Macro	The way inequalities contribute to social differences and perpetuate differences in power
Symbolic Interactionism	Micro	One-to-one interactions and communications

Sociological Theories or Perspectives Different sociological perspectives enable sociologists to view social issues through a variety of useful lenses.

## Functionalism

**Functionalism**, also called structural-functional theory, sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of the individuals in that society. Functionalism grew out of the writings of English philosopher and biologist, Hebert Spencer (1820–1903), who saw similarities between society and the human body; he argued that just as the various organs of the body work together to keep the body functioning, the various parts of society work together to keep society functioning (Spencer 1898). The parts of society that Spencer referred to were the **social institutions**, or patterns of beliefs and behaviors focused on meeting social needs, such as government, education, family, healthcare, religion, and the economy.

Émile Durkheim, another early sociologist, applied Spencer’s theory to explain how societies change and survive over time. Durkheim believed that society is a complex system of interrelated and interdependent parts that work together to maintain stability (Durkheim 1893), and that society is held together by shared values, languages, and symbols. He believed that to study society, a sociologist must look beyond individuals to social facts such as laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashion, and rituals, which all serve to govern social life. Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) defined the **function** of any recurrent activity as the part it played in social

life as a whole, and therefore the contribution it makes to social stability and continuity (Radcliffe-Brown 1952). In a healthy society, all parts work together to maintain stability, a state called **dynamic equilibrium** by later sociologists such as Parsons (1961).

Durkheim believed that individuals may make up society, but in order to study society, sociologists have to look beyond individuals to social facts. **Social facts** are the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life (Durkheim 1895). Each of these social facts serves one or more functions within a society. For example, one function of a society's laws may be to protect society from violence, while another is to punish criminal behavior, while another is to preserve public health.

Another noted structural functionalist, Robert Merton (1910–2003), pointed out that social processes often have many functions. **Manifest functions** are the consequences of a social process that are sought or anticipated, while **latent functions** are the unsought consequences of a social process. A manifest function of college education, for example, includes gaining knowledge, preparing for a career, and finding a good job that utilizes that education. Latent functions of your college years include meeting new people, participating in extracurricular activities, or even finding a spouse or partner. Another latent function of education is creating a hierarchy of employment based on the level of education attained. Latent functions can be beneficial, neutral, or harmful. Social processes that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society are called **dysfunctions**. In education, examples of dysfunction include getting bad grades, truancy, dropping out, not graduating, and not finding suitable employment.

## Criticism

One criticism of the structural-functional theory is that it can't adequately explain social change. Also problematic is the somewhat circular nature of this theory; repetitive behavior patterns are assumed to have a function, yet we profess to know that they have a function only because they are repeated. Furthermore, dysfunctions may continue, even though they don't

serve a function, which seemingly contradicts the basic premise of the theory. Many sociologists now believe that functionalism is no longer useful as a macro-level theory, but that it does serve a useful purpose in some mid-level analyses.

**Note:**

A Global Culture?



Some sociologists see the online world contributing to the creation of an emerging global culture. Are you a part of any global communities? (Photo courtesy of [quasireversible/flickr](#) )

Sociologists around the world look closely for signs of what would be an unprecedented event: the emergence of a global culture. In the past, empires such as those that existed in China, Europe, Africa, and Central



and South America linked people from many different countries, but those people rarely became part of a common culture. They lived too far from each other, spoke different languages, practiced different religions, and traded few goods. Today, increases in communication, travel, and trade have made the world a much smaller place. More and more people are able to communicate with each other instantly—wherever they are located—by telephone, video, and text. They share movies, television shows, music, games, and information over the Internet. Students can study with teachers and pupils from the other side of the globe. Governments find it harder to hide conditions inside their countries from the rest of the world. Sociologists research many different aspects of this potential global culture. Some explore the dynamics involved in the social interactions of global online communities, such as when members feel a closer kinship to other group members than to people residing in their own countries. Other sociologists study the impact this growing international culture has on smaller, less-powerful local cultures. Yet other researchers explore how international markets and the outsourcing of labor impact social inequalities. Sociology can play a key role in people's abilities to understand the nature of this emerging global culture and how to respond to it.

## **Conflict Theory**

**Conflict theory** looks at society as a competition for limited resources. This perspective is a macro-level approach most identified with the writings of German philosopher and sociologist Karl Marx (1818–1883), who saw society as being made up of individuals in different social classes who must compete for social, material, and political resources such as food and housing, employment, education, and leisure time. Social institutions like government, education, and religion reflect this competition in their inherent inequalities and help maintain the unequal social structure. Some individuals and organizations are able to obtain and keep more resources than others, and these “winners” use their power and influence to maintain social institutions. Several theorists suggested variations on this basic theme.

Polish-Austrian sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838–1909) expanded on Marx's ideas by arguing that war and conquest are the basis of civilizations. He believed that cultural and ethnic conflicts led to states being identified and defined by a dominant group that had power over other groups (Irving 2007).

German sociologist Max Weber agreed with Marx but also believed that, in addition to economic inequalities, inequalities of political power and social structure cause conflict. Weber noted that different groups were affected differently based on education, race, and gender, and that people's reactions to inequality were moderated by class differences and rates of social mobility, as well as by perceptions about the legitimacy of those in power.

German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918) believed that conflict can help integrate and stabilize a society. He said that the intensity of the conflict varies depending on the emotional involvement of the parties, the degree of solidarity within the opposing groups, and the clarity and limited nature of the goals. Simmel also showed that groups work to create internal solidarity, centralize power, and reduce dissent. Resolving conflicts can reduce tension and hostility and can pave the way for future agreements.

In the 1930s and 1940s, German philosophers, known as the Frankfurt School, developed critical theory as an elaboration on Marxist principles. Critical theory is an expansion of conflict theory and is broader than just sociology, including other social sciences and philosophy. A critical theory attempts to address structural issues causing inequality; it must explain what's wrong in current social reality, identify the people who can make changes, and provide practical goals for social transformation (Horkeimer 1982).

More recently, inequality based on gender or race has been explained in a similar manner and has identified institutionalized power structures that help to maintain inequality between groups. Janet Saltzman Chafetz (1941–2006) presented a model of feminist theory that attempts to explain the forces that maintain gender inequality as well as a theory of how such a system can be changed (Turner 2003). Similarly, critical race theory grew out of a critical analysis of race and racism from a legal point of view.

Critical race theory looks at structural inequality based on white privilege and associated wealth, power, and prestige.

## Criticism

### **Note:**

#### **Farming and Locavores: How Sociological Perspectives Might View Food Consumption**

The consumption of food is a commonplace, daily occurrence, yet it can also be associated with important moments in our lives. Eating can be an individual or a group action, and eating habits and customs are influenced by our cultures. In the context of society, our nation's food system is at the core of numerous social movements, political issues, and economic debates. Any of these factors might become a topic of sociological study. A structural-functional approach to the topic of food consumption might be interested in the role of the agriculture industry within the nation's economy and how this has changed from the early days of manual-labor farming to modern mechanized production. Another examination might study the different functions that occur in food production: from farming and harvesting to flashy packaging and mass consumerism.

A conflict theorist might be interested in the power differentials present in the regulation of food, by exploring where people's right to information intersects with corporations' drive for profit and how the government mediates those interests. Or a conflict theorist might be interested in the power and powerlessness experienced by local farmers versus large farming conglomerates, such as the documentary *Food Inc.* depicts as resulting from Monsanto's patenting of seed technology. Another topic of study might be how nutrition varies between different social classes.

A sociologist viewing food consumption through a symbolic interactionist lens would be more interested in micro-level topics, such as the symbolic use of food in religious rituals, or the role it plays in the social interaction of a family dinner. This perspective might also study the interactions among group members who identify themselves based on their sharing a

particular diet, such as vegetarians (people who don't eat meat) or locavores (people who strive to eat locally produced food).

Just as structural functionalism was criticized for focusing too much on the stability of societies, conflict theory has been criticized because it tends to focus on conflict to the exclusion of recognizing stability. Many social structures are extremely stable or have gradually progressed over time rather than changing abruptly as conflict theory would suggest.

## **Symbolic Interactionist Theory**

**Symbolic interactionism** is a micro-level theory that focuses on the relationships among individuals within a society. Communication—the exchange of meaning through language and symbols—is believed to be the way in which people make sense of their social worlds. Theorists Herman and Reynolds (1994) note that this perspective sees people as being active in shaping the social world rather than simply being acted upon.

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) is considered a founder of symbolic interactionism though he never published his work on it (LaRossa and Reitzes 1993). Mead's student, Herbert Blumer, coined the term “symbolic interactionism” and outlined these basic premises: humans interact with things based on meanings ascribed to those things; the ascribed meaning of things comes from our interactions with others and society; the meanings of things are interpreted by a person when dealing with things in specific circumstances (Blumer 1969). If you love books, for example, a symbolic interactionist might propose that you learned that books are good or important in the interactions you had with family, friends, school, or church; maybe your family had a special reading time each week, getting your library card was treated as a special event, or bedtime stories were associated with warmth and comfort.

Social scientists who apply symbolic-interactionist thinking look for patterns of interaction between individuals. Their studies often involve observation of one-on-one interactions. For example, while a conflict

theorist studying a political protest might focus on class difference, a symbolic interactionist would be more interested in how individuals in the protesting group interact, as well as the signs and symbols protesters use to communicate their message. The focus on the importance of symbols in building a society led sociologists like Erving Goffman (1922–1982) to develop a technique called **dramaturgical analysis**. Goffman used theater as an analogy for social interaction and recognized that people's interactions showed patterns of cultural "scripts." Because it can be unclear what part a person may play in a given situation, he or she has to improvise his or her role as the situation unfolds (Goffman 1958).

Studies that use the symbolic interactionist perspective are more likely to use qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or participant observation, because they seek to understand the symbolic worlds in which research subjects live.

**Constructivism** is an extension of symbolic interaction theory which proposes that reality is what humans cognitively construct it to be. We develop social constructs based on interactions with others, and those constructs that last over time are those that have meanings which are widely agreed-upon or generally accepted by most within the society. This approach is often used to understand what's defined as deviant within a society. There is no absolute definition of deviance, and different societies have constructed different meanings for deviance, as well as associating different behaviors with deviance. One situation that illustrates this is what you believe you're to do if you find a wallet in the street. In the United States, turning the wallet in to local authorities would be considered the appropriate action, and to keep the wallet would be seen as deviant. In contrast, many Eastern societies would consider it much more appropriate to keep the wallet and search for the owner yourself; turning it over to someone else, even the authorities, would be considered deviant behavior.

## Criticism

Research done from this perspective is often scrutinized because of the difficulty of remaining objective. Others criticize the extremely narrow

focus on symbolic interaction. Proponents, of course, consider this one of its greatest strengths.

## **Sociological Theory Today**

These three approaches are still the main foundation of modern sociological theory, but some evolution has been seen. Structural-functionalism was a dominant force after World War II and until the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, sociologists began to feel that structural-functionalism did not sufficiently explain the rapid social changes happening in the United States at that time.

Conflict theory then gained prominence, as there was renewed emphasis on institutionalized social inequality. Critical theory, and the particular aspects of feminist theory and critical race theory, focused on creating social change through the application of sociological principles, and the field saw a renewed emphasis on helping ordinary people understand sociology principles, in the form of public sociology.

Postmodern social theory attempts to look at society through an entirely new lens by rejecting previous macro-level attempts to explain social phenomena. Generally considered as gaining acceptance in the late 1970s and early 1980s, postmodern social theory is a micro-level approach that looks at small, local groups and individual reality. Its growth in popularity coincides with the constructivist aspects of symbolic interactionism.

## **Summary**

Sociologists develop theories to explain social events, interactions, and patterns. A theory is a proposed explanation of those social interactions. Theories have different scales. Macro-level theories, such as structural functionalism and conflict theory, attempt to explain how societies operate as a whole. Micro-level theories, such as symbolic interactionism, focus on interactions between individuals.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Which of these theories is most likely to look at the social world on a micro level?

- a. Structural functionalism
- b. Conflict theory
- c. Positivism
- d. Symbolic interactionism

---

#### Solution:

D

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Who believed that the history of society was one of class struggle?

- a. Émile Durkheim
- b. Karl Marx
- c. Erving Goffmann
- d. George Herbert Mead

---

#### Solution:

B

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Who coined the phrase symbolic interactionism?

- a. Herbert Blumer

- b. Max Weber
- c. Lester F. Ward
- d. W. I. Thomas

---

**Solution:**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

A symbolic interactionist may compare social interactions to:

- a. behaviors
- b. conflicts
- c. human organs
- d. theatrical roles

---

**Solution:**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which research technique would most likely be used by a symbolic interactionist?

- a. Surveys
- b. Participant observation
- c. Quantitative data analysis
- d. None of the above

---

**Solution:**

B



## Short Answer

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Which theory do you think better explains how societies operate—structural functionalism or conflict theory? Why?

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Do you think the way people behave in social interactions is more like the behavior of animals or more like actors playing a role in a theatrical production? Why?

## Further Research

People often think of all conflict as violent, but many conflicts can be resolved nonviolently. To learn more about nonviolent methods of conflict resolution check out the Albert Einstein Institution

<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/ae-institution>

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## **Glossary**

conflict theory

a theory that looks at society as a competition for limited resources

constructivism

an extension of symbolic interaction theory which proposes that reality is what humans cognitively construct it to be

dramaturgical analysis

a technique sociologists use in which they view society through the metaphor of theatrical performance

dynamic equilibrium

a stable state in which all parts of a healthy society work together properly

dysfunctions

social patterns that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society

function

the part a recurrent activity plays in the social life as a whole and the contribution it makes to structural continuity

functionalism

a theoretical approach that sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of individuals that make up that society

grand theories

an attempt to explain large-scale relationships and answer fundamental questions such as why societies form and why they change

hypothesis

a testable proposition

latent functions

the unrecognized or unintended consequences of a social process

macro-level

a wide-scale view of the role of social structures within a society

manifest functions

sought consequences of a social process

micro-level theories

the study of specific relationships between individuals or small groups

paradigms

philosophical and theoretical frameworks used within a discipline to formulate theories, generalizations, and the experiments performed in support of them

social facts

the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life

social institutions

patterns of beliefs and behaviors focused on meeting social needs

social solidarity

the social ties that bind a group of people together such as kinship, shared location, and religion

symbolic interactionism

a theoretical perspective through which scholars examine the relationship of individuals within their society by studying their communication (language and symbols)

theory

a proposed explanation about social interactions or society

## Why Study Sociology?

- Explain why it is worthwhile to study sociology
- Identify ways sociology is applied in the real world



The research  
of  
sociologists  
Kenneth and  
Mamie Clark  
helped the  
Supreme  
Court decide  
to end  
“separate but  
equal” racial  
segregation  
in schools in  
the United  
States.  
(Photo  
courtesy of  
public  
domain)

When Elizabeth Eckford tried to enter Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in September 1957, she was met by an angry crowd. But she knew she had the law on her side. Three years earlier in the landmark *Brown vs. the Board of Education* case, the U.S. Supreme Court had overturned twenty-one state laws that allowed blacks and whites to be taught in separate school systems as long as the school systems were “equal.” One of the major factors influencing that decision was research conducted by the husband-and-wife team of sociologists, Kenneth and Mamie Clark. Their research showed that segregation was harmful to young black schoolchildren, and the Court found that harm to be unconstitutional.

Since it was first founded, many people interested in sociology have been driven by the scholarly desire to contribute knowledge to this field, while others have seen it as way not only to study society but also to improve it. Besides desegregation, sociology has played a crucial role in many important social reforms, such as equal opportunity for women in the workplace, improved treatment for individuals with mental handicaps or learning disabilities, increased accessibility and accommodation for people with physical handicaps, the right of native populations to preserve their land and culture, and prison system reforms.

The prominent sociologist Peter L. Berger (1929– ), in his 1963 book *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, describes a sociologist as “someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way.” He asserts that sociologists have a natural interest in the monumental moments of people’s lives, as well as a fascination with banal, everyday occurrences. Berger also describes the “aha” moment when a sociological theory becomes applicable and understood:

“[T]here is a deceptive simplicity and obviousness about some sociological investigations. One reads them, nods at the familiar scene, remarks that one has heard all this before and don't people have better things to do than to waste their time on truisms—until one is suddenly brought up against an insight that radically questions everything one had previously assumed about this familiar scene. This is the point at which one begins to sense the excitement of sociology. (Berger 1963)”

Sociology can be exciting because it teaches people ways to recognize how they fit into the world and how others perceive them. Looking at themselves and society from a sociological perspective helps people see where they connect to different groups based on the many different ways they classify themselves and how society classifies them in turn. It raises awareness of how those classifications—such as economic and status levels, education, ethnicity, or sexual orientation—affect perceptions.

Sociology teaches people not to accept easy explanations. It teaches them a way to organize their thinking so that they can ask better questions and formulate better answers. It makes people more aware that there are many different kinds of people in the world who do not necessarily think the way they do. It increases their willingness and ability to try to see the world from other people's perspectives. This prepares them to live and work in an increasingly diverse and integrated world.

## **Sociology in the Workplace**

Employers continue to seek people with what are called “transferable skills.” This means that they want to hire people whose knowledge and education can be applied in a variety of settings and whose skills will contribute to various tasks. Studying sociology can provide people with this wide knowledge and a skill set that can contribute to many workplaces, including

- an understanding of social systems and large bureaucracies;
- the ability to devise and carry out research projects to assess whether a program or policy is working;
- the ability to collect, read, and analyze statistical information from polls or surveys;
- the ability to recognize important differences in people’s social, cultural, and economic backgrounds;
- skills in preparing reports and communicating complex ideas; and



- the capacity for critical thinking about social issues and problems that confront modern society. (Department of Sociology, University of Alabama)

Sociology prepares people for a wide variety of careers. Besides actually conducting social research or training others in the field, people who graduate from college with a degree in sociology are hired by government agencies and corporations in fields such as social services, counseling (e.g., family planning, career, substance abuse), community planning, health services, marketing, market research, and human resources. Even a small amount of training in sociology can be an asset in careers like sales, public relations, journalism, teaching, law, and criminal justice.

**Note:****Please “Friend” Me: Students and Social Networking**

The phenomenon known as Facebook was designed specifically for students. Whereas earlier generations wrote notes in each other’s printed yearbooks at the end of the academic year, modern technology and the Internet ushered in dynamic new ways for people to interact socially. Instead of having to meet up on campus, students can call, text, and Skype from their dorm rooms. Instead of a study group gathering weekly in the library, online forums and chat rooms help learners connect. The availability and immediacy of computer technology has forever changed the ways in which students engage with each other.

Now, after several social networks have vied for primacy, a few have established their place in the market and some have attracted niche audience. While Facebook launched the social networking trend geared toward teens and young adults, now people of all ages are actively “friending” each other. LinkedIn distinguished itself by focusing on professional connections and served as a virtual world for workplace networking. Newer offshoots like Foursquare help people connect based on the real-world places they frequent, while Twitter has cornered the market on brevity.

The widespread ownership of smartphones adds to this social experience; the Pew Research Center (2012) found that the majority of people in the United States with mobile phones now have “smart” phones with Internet capability. Many people worldwide can now access Facebook, Twitter, and other social media from virtually anywhere, and there seems to be an increasing acceptance of smartphone use in many diverse and previously prohibited settings. The outcomes of smartphone use, as with other social media, are not yet clear.

These newer modes of social interaction have also spawned harmful consequences, such as cyberbullying and what some call FAD, or Facebook Addiction Disorder. Researchers have also examined other potential negative impacts, such as whether Facebooking lowers a student’s GPA, or whether there might be long-term effects of replacing face-to-face interaction with social media.

All of these social networks demonstrate emerging ways that people interact, whether positive or negative. They illustrate how sociological topics are alive and changing today. Social media will most certainly be a developing topic in the study of sociology for decades to come.

## **Summary**

Studying sociology is beneficial both for the individual and for society. By studying sociology people learn how to think critically about social issues and problems that confront our society. The study of sociology enriches students’ lives and prepares them for careers in an increasingly diverse world. Society benefits because people with sociological training are better prepared to make informed decisions about social issues and take effective action to deal with them.

## **Section Quiz**

### **Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Kenneth and Mamie Clark used sociological research to show that segregation was:

- a. beneficial
- b. harmful
- c. illegal
- d. of no importance

---

**Solution:**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Studying sociology helps people analyze data because they learn:

- a. interview techniques
- b. to apply statistics
- c. to generate theories
- d. all of the above

---

**Solution:**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Berger describes sociologists as concerned with:

- a. monumental moments in people's lives
- b. common everyday life events
- c. both a and b
- d. none of the above

---

**Solution:**

C

**Short Answer****Exercise:****Problem:**

How do you think taking a sociology course might affect your social interactions?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

What sort of career are you interested in? How could studying sociology help you in this career?

**Further Research**

Social communication is rapidly evolving due to ever improving technologies. To learn more about how sociologists study the impact of these changes check out <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/media>

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## Introduction to Socialization

class="introduction"

Socialization is the way we learn the norms and beliefs of our society. From our earliest family and play experiences, we are made aware of societal values and expectations. (Photo courtesy of woodleywonderworks/flickr )



In the summer of 2005, police detective Mark Holste followed an investigator from the Department of Children and Families to a home in Plant City, Florida. They were there to look into a statement from the neighbor concerning a shabby house on Old Sydney Road. A small girl was reported peering from one of its broken windows. This seemed odd because no one in the neighborhood had seen a young child in or around the home, which had been inhabited for the past three years by a woman, her boyfriend, and two adult sons.

Who was the mystery girl in the window?

Entering the house, Detective Holste and his team were shocked. It was the worst mess they'd ever seen, infested with cockroaches, smeared with feces

and urine from both people and pets, and filled with dilapidated furniture and ragged window coverings.

Detective Holste headed down a hallway and entered a small room. That's where he found the little girl, with big, vacant eyes, staring into the darkness. A newspaper report later described the detective's first encounter with the child: "She lay on a torn, moldy mattress on the floor. She was curled on her side . . . her ribs and collarbone jutted out . . . her black hair was matted, crawling with lice. Insect bites, rashes and sores pocked her skin . . . She was naked—except for a swollen diaper. . . . Her name, her mother said, was Danielle. She was almost seven years old" (DeGregory 2008).

Detective Holste immediately carried Danielle out of the home. She was taken to a hospital for medical treatment and evaluation. Through extensive testing, doctors determined that, although she was severely malnourished, Danielle was able to see, hear, and vocalize normally. Still, she wouldn't look anyone in the eyes, didn't know how to chew or swallow solid food, didn't cry, didn't respond to stimuli that would typically cause pain, and didn't know how to communicate either with words or simple gestures such as nodding "yes" or "no." Likewise, although tests showed she had no chronic diseases or genetic abnormalities, the only way she could stand was with someone holding onto her hands, and she "walked sideways on her toes, like a crab" (DeGregory 2008).

What had happened to Danielle? Put simply: beyond the basic requirements for survival, she had been neglected. Based on their investigation, social workers concluded that she had been left almost entirely alone in rooms like the one where she was found. Without regular interaction—the holding, hugging, talking, the explanations and demonstrations given to most young children—she had not learned to walk or to speak, to eat or to interact, to play or even to understand the world around her. From a sociological point of view, Danielle had not been socialized.

**Socialization** is the process through which people are taught to be proficient members of a society. It describes the ways that people come to understand societal norms and expectations, to accept society's beliefs, and to be aware of societal values. *Socialization* is not the same as *socializing*

(interacting with others, like family, friends, and coworkers); to be precise, it is a sociological process that occurs through socializing. As Danielle's story illustrates, even the most basic of human activities are learned. You may be surprised to know that even physical tasks like sitting, standing, and walking had not automatically developed for Danielle as she grew. And without socialization, Danielle hadn't learned about the material culture of her society (the tangible objects a culture uses): for example, she couldn't hold a spoon, bounce a ball, or use a chair for sitting. She also hadn't learned its nonmaterial culture, such as its beliefs, values, and norms. She had no understanding of the concept of "family," didn't know cultural expectations for using a bathroom for elimination, and had no sense of modesty. Most importantly, she hadn't learned to use the symbols that make up language—through which we learn about who we are, how we fit with other people, and the natural and social worlds in which we live.

Sociologists have long been fascinated by circumstances like Danielle's—in which a child receives sufficient human support to survive, but virtually no social interaction—because they highlight how much we depend on social interaction to provide the information and skills that we need to be part of society or even to develop a "self."

The necessity for early social contact was demonstrated by the research of Harry and Margaret Harlow. From 1957 to 1963, the Harlows conducted a series of experiments studying how rhesus monkeys, which behave a lot like people, are affected by isolation as babies. They studied monkeys raised under two types of "substitute" mothering circumstances: a mesh and wire sculpture, or a soft terrycloth "mother." The monkeys systematically preferred the company of a soft, terrycloth substitute mother (closely resembling a rhesus monkey) that was unable to feed them, to a mesh and wire mother that provided sustenance via a feeding tube. This demonstrated that while food was important, social comfort was of greater value (Harlow and Harlow 1962; Harlow 1971). Later experiments testing more severe isolation revealed that such deprivation of social contact led to significant developmental and social challenges later in life.





Baby rhesus monkeys, like humans, need to be raised with social contact for healthy development. (Photo courtesy of Paul Asman and Jill Lenoble/flickr)

In the following sections, we will examine the importance of the complex process of socialization and how it takes place through interaction with many individuals, groups, and social institutions. We will explore how socialization is not only critical to children as they develop but how it is also a lifelong process through which we become prepared for new social environments and expectations in every stage of our lives. But first, we will turn to scholarship about self-development, the process of coming to recognize a sense of self, a “self” that is then able to be socialized.

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## Glossary

socialization

the process wherein people come to understand societal norms and expectations, to accept society's beliefs, and to be aware of societal values

## Theories of Self-Development

- Understand the difference between psychological and sociological theories of self-development
- Explain the process of moral development

When we are born, we have a genetic makeup and biological traits. However, who we are as human beings develops through social interaction. Many scholars, both in the fields of psychology and in sociology, have described the process of self-development as a precursor to understanding how that “self” becomes socialized.

## Psychological Perspectives on Self-Development

Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was one of the most influential modern scientists to put forth a theory about how people develop a sense of self. He believed that personality and sexual development were closely linked, and he divided the maturation process into psychosexual stages: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital. He posited that people’s self-development is closely linked to early stages of development, like breastfeeding, toilet training, and sexual awareness (Freud 1905).

According to Freud, failure to properly engage in or disengage from a specific stage results in emotional and psychological consequences throughout adulthood. An adult with an oral fixation may indulge in overeating or binge drinking. An anal fixation may produce a neat freak (hence the term “anal retentive”), while a person stuck in the phallic stage may be promiscuous or emotionally immature. Although no solid empirical evidence supports Freud’s theory, his ideas continue to contribute to the work of scholars in a variety of disciplines.

### **Note:**

#### **Sociology or Psychology: What’s the Difference?**

You might be wondering: if sociologists and psychologists are both interested in people and their behavior, how are these two disciplines

different? What do they agree on, and where do their ideas diverge? The answers are complicated, but the distinction is important to scholars in both fields.

As a general difference, we might say that while both disciplines are interested in human behavior, psychologists are focused on how the mind influences that behavior, while sociologists study the role of society in shaping behavior. Psychologists are interested in people's mental development and how their minds process their world. Sociologists are more likely to focus on how different aspects of society contribute to an individual's relationship with his world. Another way to think of the difference is that psychologists tend to look inward (mental health, emotional processes), while sociologists tend to look outward (social institutions, cultural norms, interactions with others) to understand human behavior.

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) was the first to make this distinction in research, when he attributed differences in suicide rates among people to social causes (religious differences) rather than to psychological causes (like their mental wellbeing) (Durkheim 1897). Today, we see this same distinction. For example, a sociologist studying how a couple gets to the point of their first kiss on a date might focus her research on cultural norms for dating, social patterns of sexual activity over time, or how this process is different for seniors than for teens. A psychologist would more likely be interested in the person's earliest sexual awareness or the mental processing of sexual desire.

Sometimes sociologists and psychologists have collaborated to increase knowledge. In recent decades, however, their fields have become more clearly separated as sociologists increasingly focus on large societal issues and patterns, while psychologists remain honed in on the human mind. Both disciplines make valuable contributions through different approaches that provide us with different types of useful insights.

Psychologist Erik Erikson (1902–1994) created a theory of personality development based, in part, on the work of Freud. However, Erikson believed the personality continued to change over time and was never truly finished. His theory includes eight stages of development, beginning with

birth and ending with death. According to Erikson, people move through these stages throughout their lives. In contrast to Freud's focus on psychosexual stages and basic human urges, Erikson's view of self-development gave credit to more social aspects, like the way we negotiate between our own base desires and what is socially accepted (Erikson 1982).

Jean Piaget (1896–1980) was a psychologist who specialized in child development who focused specifically on the role of social interactions in their development. He recognized that the development of self evolved through a negotiation between the world as it exists in one's mind and the world that exists as it is experienced socially (Piaget 1954). All three of these thinkers have contributed to our modern understanding of self-development.

## **Sociological Theories of Self-Development**

One of the pioneering contributors to sociological perspectives was Charles Cooley (1864–1929). He asserted that people's self understanding is constructed, in part, by their perception of how others view them—a process termed “the looking glass self” (Cooley 1902).

Later, George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) studied the **self**, a person's distinct identity that is developed through social interaction. In order to engage in this process of “self,” an individual has to be able to view him or herself through the eyes of others. That's not an ability that we are born with (Mead 1934). Through socialization we learn to put ourselves in someone else's shoes and look at the world through their perspective. This assists us in becoming self-aware, as we look at ourselves from the perspective of the “other.” The case of Danielle, for example, illustrates what happens when social interaction is absent from early experience: Danielle had no ability to see herself as others would see her. From Mead's point of view, she had no “self.”

How do we go from being newborns to being humans with “selves?” Mead believed that there is a specific path of development that all people go through. During the preparatory stage, children are only capable of imitation: they have no ability to imagine how others see things. They copy

the actions of people with whom they regularly interact, such as their mothers and fathers. This is followed by the play stage, during which children begin to take on the role that one other person might have. Thus, children might try on a parent's point of view by acting out "grownup" behavior, like playing "dress up" and acting out the "mom" role, or talking on a toy telephone the way they see their father do.

During the game stage, children learn to consider several roles at the same time and how those roles interact with each other. They learn to understand interactions involving different people with a variety of purposes. For example, a child at this stage is likely to be aware of the different responsibilities of people in a restaurant who together make for a smooth dining experience (someone seats you, another takes your order, someone else cooks the food, while yet another clears away dirty dishes).

Finally, children develop, understand, and learn the idea of the **generalized other**, the common behavioral expectations of general society. By this stage of development, an individual is able to imagine how he or she is viewed by one or many others—and thus, from a sociological perspective, to have a "self" (Mead 1934; Mead 1964).

## **Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development**

**Moral development** is an important part of the socialization process. The term refers to the way people learn what society considered to be "good" and "bad," which is important for a smoothly functioning society. Moral development prevents people from acting on unchecked urges, instead considering what is right for society and good for others. Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987) was interested in how people learn to decide what is right and what is wrong. To understand this topic, he developed a theory of moral development that includes three levels: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional.

In the preconventional stage, young children, who lack a higher level of cognitive ability, experience the world around them only through their senses. It isn't until the teen years that the conventional theory develops,

when youngsters become increasingly aware of others' feelings and take those into consideration when determining what's "good" and "bad." The final stage, called postconventional, is when people begin to think of morality in abstract terms, such as Americans believing that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. At this stage, people also recognize that legality and morality do not always match up evenly (Kohlberg 1981). When hundreds of thousands of Egyptians turned out in 2011 to protest government corruption, they were using postconventional morality. They understood that although their government was legal, it was not morally correct.

### **Gilligan's Theory of Moral Development and Gender**

Another sociologist, Carol Gilligan (1936–), recognized that Kohlberg's theory might show gender bias since his research was only conducted on male subjects. Would female study subjects have responded differently? Would a female social scientist notice different patterns when analyzing the research? To answer the first question, she set out to study differences between how boys and girls developed morality. Gilligan's research demonstrated that boys and girls do, in fact, have different understandings of morality. Boys tend to have a justice perspective, by placing emphasis on rules and laws. Girls, on the other hand, have a care and responsibility perspective; they consider people's reasons behind behavior that seems morally wrong.

Gilligan also recognized that Kohlberg's theory rested on the assumption that the justice perspective was the right, or better, perspective. Gilligan, in contrast, theorized that neither perspective was "better": the two norms of justice served different purposes. Ultimately, she explained that boys are socialized for a work environment where rules make operations run smoothly, while girls are socialized for a home environment where flexibility allows for harmony in caretaking and nurturing (Gilligan 1982; Gilligan 1990).

**Note:**

What a Pretty Little Lady!

“What a cute dress!” “I like the ribbons in your hair.” “Wow, you look so pretty today.”

According to Lisa Bloom, author of *Think: Straight Talk for Women to Stay Smart in a Dumbed Down World*, most of us use pleasantries like these when we first meet little girls. “So what?” you might ask.

Bloom asserts that we are too focused on the appearance of young girls, and as a result, our society is socializing them to believe that how they look is of vital importance. And Bloom may be on to something. How often do you tell a little boy how attractive his outfit is, how nice looking his shoes are, or how handsome he looks today? To support her assertions, Bloom cites, as one example, that about 50 percent of girls ages three to six worry about being fat (Bloom 2011). We’re talking about kindergarteners who are concerned about their body image. Sociologists are acutely interested in of this type of gender socialization, by which societal expectations of how boys and girls should *be*—how they should behave, what toys and colors they should like, and how important their attire is—are reinforced.

One solution to this type of gender socialization is being experimented with at the Egalia preschool in Sweden, where children develop in a genderless environment. All the children at Egalia are referred to with neutral terms like “friend” instead of “he” or “she.” Play areas and toys are consciously set up to eliminate any reinforcement of gender expectations (Haney 2011). Egalia strives to eliminate all societal gender norms from these children’s preschool world.

Extreme? Perhaps. So what is the middle ground? Bloom suggests that we start with simple steps: when introduced to a young girl, ask about her favorite book or what she likes. In short, engage with her mind ... not her outward appearance (Bloom 2011).

## Summary

Psychological theories of self-development have been broadened by sociologists who explicitly study the role of society and social interaction in



self-development. Charles Cooley and George Mead both contributed significantly to the sociological understanding of the development of self. Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan developed their ideas further and researched how our sense of morality develops. Gilligan added the dimension of gender differences to Kohlberg's theory.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Socialization, as a sociological term, describes:

- a. how people interact during social situations
- b. how people learn societal norms, beliefs, and values
- c. a person's internal mental state when in a group setting
- d. the difference between introverts and extroverts

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

### Exercise:

**Problem:** The Harlows' study on rhesus monkeys showed that:

- a. rhesus monkeys raised by other primate species are poorly socialized
- b. monkeys can be adequately socialized by imitating humans
- c. food is more important than social comfort
- d. social comfort is more important than food

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** What occurs in Lawrence Kohlberg's conventional level?

- a. Children develop the ability to have abstract thoughts.
- b. Morality is developed by pain and pleasure.
- c. Children begin to consider what society considers moral and immoral.
- d. Parental beliefs have no influence on children's morality.

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What did Carol Gilligan believe earlier researchers into morality had overlooked?

- a. The justice perspective
- b. Sympathetic reactions to moral situations
- c. The perspective of females
- d. How social environment affects how morality develops

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What is one way to distinguish between psychology and sociology?

- a. Psychology focuses on the mind, while sociology focuses on society.
  - b. Psychologists are interested in mental health, while sociologists are interested in societal functions.
  - c. Psychologists look inward to understand behavior while sociologists look outward.
  - d. All of the above
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

How did nearly complete isolation as a child affect Danielle's verbal abilities?

- a. She could not communicate at all.
  - b. She never learned words, but she did learn signs.
  - c. She could not understand much, but she could use gestures.
  - d. She could understand and use basic language like "yes" and "no."
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Think of a current issue or pattern that a sociologist might study. What types of questions would the sociologist ask, and what research methods might he employ? Now consider the questions and methods a psychologist might use to study the same issue. Comment on their different approaches.

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Explain why it's important to conduct research using both male and female participants. What sociological topics might show gender differences? Provide some examples to illustrate your ideas.

**Further Research**

Lawrence Kohlberg was most famous for his research using moral dilemmas. He presented dilemmas to boys and asked them how they would judge the situations. Visit <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Dilemma> to read about Kohlberg's most famous moral dilemma, known as the Heinz dilemma.

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## **Glossary**

generalized other

the common behavioral expectations of general society

moral development

the way people learn what is "good" and "bad" in society

self

a person's distinct sense of identity as developed through social interaction

## Why Socialization Matters

- Understand the importance of socialization both for individuals and society
- Explain the nature versus nurture debate

Socialization is critical both to individuals and to the societies in which they live. It illustrates how completely intertwined human beings and their social worlds are. First, it is through teaching culture to new members that a society perpetuates itself. If new generations of a society don't learn its way of life, it ceases to exist. Whatever is distinctive about a culture must be transmitted to those who join it in order for a society to survive. For U.S. culture to continue, for example, children in the United States must learn about cultural values related to democracy: they have to learn the norms of voting, as well as how to use material objects such as voting machines. Of course, some would argue that it's just as important in U.S. culture for the younger generation to learn the etiquette of eating in a restaurant or the rituals of tailgate parties at football games. In fact, there are many ideas and objects that people in the United States teach children about in hopes of keeping the society's way of life going through another generation.



Socialization teaches us our society's expectations for dining out. The manners and customs of different cultures (When can you use your hands to eat? How should you compliment the cook? Who is the "head" of the table?) are learned through

socialization. (Photo courtesy of  
Niyam Bhushan/flickr)

Socialization is just as essential to us as individuals. Social interaction provides the means via which we gradually become able to see ourselves through the eyes of others, and how we learn who we are and how we fit into the world around us. In addition, to function successfully in society, we have to learn the basics of both material and nonmaterial culture, everything from how to dress ourselves to what's suitable attire for a specific occasion; from when we sleep to what we sleep on; and from what's considered appropriate to eat for dinner to how to use the stove to prepare it. Most importantly, we have to learn language—whether it's the dominant language or one common in a subculture, whether it's verbal or through signs—in order to communicate and to think. As we saw with Danielle, without socialization we literally have no self.

## **Nature versus Nurture**

Some experts assert that who we are is a result of **nurture**—the relationships and caring that surround us. Others argue that who we are is based entirely in genetics. According to this belief, our temperaments, interests, and talents are set before birth. From this perspective, then, who we are depends on **nature**.

One way researchers attempt to measure the impact of nature is by studying twins. Some studies have followed identical twins who were raised separately. The pairs shared the same genetics but in some cases were socialized in different ways. Instances of this type of situation are rare, but studying the degree to which identical twins raised apart are the same and different can give researchers insight into the way our temperaments, preferences, and abilities are shaped by our genetic makeup versus our social environment.

For example, in 1968, twin girls born to a mentally ill mother were put up for adoption, separated from each other, and raised in different households.



The adoptive parents, and certainly the babies, did not realize the girls were one of five pairs of twins who were made subjects of a scientific study (Flam 2007).

In 2003, the two women, then age thirty-five, were reunited. Elyse Schein and Paula Bernstein sat together in awe, feeling like they were looking into a mirror. Not only did they look alike but they also behaved alike, using the same hand gestures and facial expressions (Spratling 2007). Studies like these point to the genetic roots of our temperament and behavior.

Though genetics and hormones play an important role in human behavior, sociology's larger concern is the effect society has on human behavior, the "nurture" side of the nature versus nurture debate. What race were the twins? From what social class were their parents? What about gender? Religion? All these factors affected the lives of the twins as much as their genetic makeup and are critical to consider as we look at life through the sociological lens.

**Note:**

The Life of Chris Langan, the Smartest Man You've Never Heard Of Bouncer. Firefighter. Factory worker. Cowboy. Chris Langan spent the majority of his adult life just getting by with jobs like these. He had no college degree, few resources, and a past filled with much disappointment. Chris Langan also had an IQ of over 195, nearly 100 points higher than the average person (Brabham 2001). So why didn't Chris become a neurosurgeon, professor, or aeronautical engineer? According to Malcolm Gladwell (2008) in his book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Chris didn't possess the set of social skills necessary to succeed on such a high level—skills that aren't innate but learned.

Gladwell looked to a recent study conducted by sociologist Annette Lareau in which she closely shadowed 12 families from various economic backgrounds and examined their parenting techniques. Parents from lower income families followed a strategy of "accomplishment of natural growth," which is to say they let their children develop on their own with a large amount of independence; parents from higher-income families, however, "actively fostered and accessed a child's talents, opinions, and

skills” (Gladwell 2008). These parents were more likely to engage in analytical conversation, encourage active questioning of the establishment, and foster development of negotiation skills. The parents were also able to introduce their children to a wide range of activities, from sports to music to accelerated academic programs. When one middle-class child was denied entry to a gifted and talented program, the mother petitioned the school and arranged additional testing until her daughter was admitted. Lower-income parents, however, were more likely to unquestioningly obey authorities such as school boards. Their children were not being socialized to comfortably confront the system and speak up (Gladwell 2008).

What does this have to do with Chris Langan, deemed by some the smartest man in the world (Brabham 2001)? Chris was born in severe poverty, moving across the country with an abusive and alcoholic stepfather. His genius went largely unnoticed. After accepting a full scholarship to Reed College, he lost his funding after his mother failed to fill out necessary paperwork. Unable to successfully make his case to the administration, Chris, who had received straight A’s the previous semester, was given F’s on his transcript and forced to drop out. After he enrolled in Montana State, an administrator’s refusal to rearrange his class schedule left him unable to find the means necessary to travel the 16 miles to attend classes. What Chris had in brilliance, he lacked in practical intelligence, or what psychologist Robert Sternberg defines as “knowing what to say to whom, knowing when to say it, and knowing how to say it for maximum effect” (Sternberg et al. 2000). Such knowledge was never part of his socialization.

Chris gave up on school and began working an array of blue-collar jobs, pursuing his intellectual interests on the side. Though he’s recently garnered attention for his “Cognitive Theoretic Model of the Universe,” he remains weary of and resistant to the educational system.

As Gladwell concluded, “He’d had to make his way alone, and no one—not rock stars, not professional athletes, not software billionaires, and not even geniuses—ever makes it alone” (2008).



Identical twins may look alike, but their differences can give us clues to the effects of socialization.  
(Photo courtesy of D. Flam/flickr)

Sociologists all recognize the importance of socialization for healthy individual and societal development. But how do scholars working in the three major theoretical paradigms approach this topic? Structural functionalists would say that socialization is essential to society, both because it trains members to operate successfully within it and because it perpetuates culture by transmitting it to new generations. Without socialization, a society's culture would perish as members died off. A conflict theorist might argue that socialization reproduces inequality from generation to generation by conveying different expectations and norms to those with different social characteristics. For example, individuals are socialized differently by gender, social class, and race. As in Chris Langan's case, this creates different (unequal) opportunities. An interactionist

studying socialization is concerned with face-to-face exchanges and symbolic communication. For example, dressing baby boys in blue and baby girls in pink is one small way we convey messages about differences in gender roles.

## Summary

Socialization is important because it helps uphold societies and cultures; it is also a key part of individual development. Research demonstrates that who we are is affected by both nature (our genetic and hormonal makeup) and nurture (the social environment in which we are raised). Sociology is most concerned with the way that society's influence affects our behavior patterns, made clear by the way behavior varies across class and gender.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Why do sociologists need to be careful when drawing conclusions from twin studies?

- a. The results do not apply to singletons.
- b. The twins were often raised in different ways.
- c. The twins may turn out to actually be fraternal.
- d. The sample sizes are often small.

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

D

### Exercise:

**Problem:**

From a sociological perspective, which factor does not greatly influence a person's socialization?

- a. Gender
- b. Class
- c. Blood type
- d. Race

---

**Solution:****Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Chris Langan's story illustrates that:

- a. children raised in one-parent households tend to have higher IQs.
- b. intelligence is more important than socialization.
- c. socialization can be more important than intelligence.
- d. neither socialization nor intelligence affects college admissions.

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**Solution:****Answer**

C

**Short Answer****Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Why are twin studies an important way to learn about the relative effects of genetics and socialization on children? What questions about human development do you believe twin studies are best for answering? For what types of questions would twin studies not be as helpful?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Why do you think that people like Chris Langan continue to have difficulty even after they are helped through societal systems? What is it they've missed that prevents them from functioning successfully in the social world?

**Further Research**

Learn more about five other sets of twins who grew up apart and discovered each other later in life at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/twins>

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## **Glossary**

nature

the influence of our genetic makeup on self-development

nurture

the role that our social environment plays in self-development

## Agents of Socialization

- Learn the roles of families and peer groups in socialization
- Understand how we are socialized through formal institutions like schools, workplaces, and the government

Socialization helps people learn to function successfully in their social worlds. How does the process of socialization occur? How do we learn to use the objects of our society's material culture? How do we come to adopt the beliefs, values, and norms that represent its nonmaterial culture? This learning takes place through interaction with various agents of socialization, like peer groups and families, plus both formal and informal social institutions.

## Social Group Agents

Social groups often provide the first experiences of socialization. Families, and later peer groups, communicate expectations and reinforce norms. People first learn to use the tangible objects of material culture in these settings, as well as being introduced to the beliefs and values of society.

## Family

Family is the first agent of socialization. Mothers and fathers, siblings and grandparents, plus members of an extended family, all teach a child what he or she needs to know. For example, they show the child how to use objects (such as clothes, computers, eating utensils, books, bikes); how to relate to others (some as "family," others as "friends," still others as "strangers" or "teachers" or "neighbors"); and how the world works (what is "real" and what is "imagined"). As you are aware, either from your own experience as a child or from your role in helping to raise one, socialization includes teaching and learning about an unending array of objects and ideas.

Keep in mind, however, that families do not socialize children in a vacuum. Many social factors affect the way a family raises its children. For example, we can use sociological imagination to recognize that individual behaviors



are affected by the historical period in which they take place. Sixty years ago, it would not have been considered especially strict for a father to hit his son with a wooden spoon or a belt if he misbehaved, but today that same action might be considered child abuse.

Sociologists recognize that race, social class, religion, and other societal factors play an important role in socialization. For example, poor families usually emphasize obedience and conformity when raising their children, while wealthy families emphasize judgment and creativity (National Opinion Research Center 2008). This may occur because working-class parents have less education and more repetitive-task jobs for which it is helpful to be able to follow rules and conform. Wealthy parents tend to have better educations and often work in managerial positions or careers that require creative problem solving, so they teach their children behaviors that are beneficial in these positions. This means children are effectively socialized and raised to take the types of jobs their parents already have, thus reproducing the class system (Kohn 1977). Likewise, children are socialized to abide by gender norms, perceptions of race, and class-related behaviors.

In Sweden, for instance, stay-at-home fathers are an accepted part of the social landscape. A government policy provides subsidized time off work—480 days for families with newborns—with the option of the paid leave being shared between mothers and fathers. As one stay-at-home dad says, being home to take care of his baby son “is a real fatherly thing to do. I think that’s very masculine” (Associated Press 2011). Close to 90 percent of Swedish fathers use their paternity leave (about 340,000 dads); on average they take seven weeks per birth (The Economist, 2014). How do U.S. policies—and our society’s expected gender roles—compare? How will Swedish children raised this way be socialized to parental gender norms? How might that be different from parental gender norms in the United States?



The socialized roles of dads  
(and moms) vary by society.  
(Photo courtesy of Nate  
Grigg/flickr)

## Peer Groups

A **peer group** is made up of people who are similar in age and social status and who share interests. Peer group socialization begins in the earliest years, such as when kids on a playground teach younger children the norms about taking turns, the rules of a game, or how to shoot a basket. As children grow into teenagers, this process continues. Peer groups are important to adolescents in a new way, as they begin to develop an identity separate from their parents and exert independence. Additionally, peer groups provide their own opportunities for socialization since kids usually engage in different types of activities with their peers than they do with their families. Peer groups provide adolescents' first major socialization experience outside the realm of their families. Interestingly, studies have shown that although friendships rank high in adolescents' priorities, this is balanced by parental influence.

## Institutional Agents

The social institutions of our culture also inform our socialization. Formal institutions—like schools, workplaces, and the government—teach people how to behave in and navigate these systems. Other institutions, like the media, contribute to socialization by inundating us with messages about norms and expectations.

## School

Most U.S. children spend about seven hours a day, 180 days a year, in school, which makes it hard to deny the importance school has on their socialization (U.S. Department of Education 2004). Students are not in school only to study math, reading, science, and other subjects—the manifest function of this system. Schools also serve a latent function in society by socializing children into behaviors like practicing teamwork, following a schedule, and using textbooks.



These  
kindergarteners  
aren't just

learning to read  
and write; they  
are being  
socialized to  
norms like  
keeping their  
hands to  
themselves,  
standing in line,  
and reciting the  
Pledge of  
Allegiance.  
(Photo courtesy  
of Bonner  
Springs  
Library/flickr)

School and classroom rituals, led by teachers serving as role models and leaders, regularly reinforce what society expects from children. Sociologists describe this aspect of schools as the **hidden curriculum**, the informal teaching done by schools.

For example, in the United States, schools have built a sense of competition into the way grades are awarded and the way teachers evaluate students (Bowles and Gintis 1976). When children participate in a relay race or a math contest, they learn there are winners and losers in society. When children are required to work together on a project, they practice teamwork with other people in cooperative situations. The hidden curriculum prepares children for the adult world. Children learn how to deal with bureaucracy, rules, expectations, waiting their turn, and sitting still for hours during the day. Schools in different cultures socialize children differently in order to prepare them to function well in those cultures. The latent functions of teamwork and dealing with bureaucracy are features of U.S. culture.

Schools also socialize children by teaching them about citizenship and national pride. In the United States, children are taught to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Most districts require classes about U.S. history and geography. As academic understanding of history evolves, textbooks in the United States have been scrutinized and revised to update attitudes toward other cultures as well as perspectives on historical events; thus, children are socialized to a different national or world history than earlier textbooks may have done. For example, information about the mistreatment of African Americans and Native American Indians more accurately reflects those events than in textbooks of the past.

**Note:**

**Controversial Textbooks**

On August 13, 2001, twenty South Korean men gathered in Seoul. Each chopped off one of his own fingers because of textbooks. These men took drastic measures to protest eight middle school textbooks approved by Tokyo for use in Japanese middle schools. According to the Korean government (and other East Asian nations), the textbooks glossed over negative events in Japan's history at the expense of other Asian countries. In the early 1900s, Japan was one of Asia's more aggressive nations. For instance, it held Korea as a colony between 1910 and 1945. Today, Koreans argue that the Japanese are whitewashing that colonial history through these textbooks. One major criticism is that they do not mention that, during World War II, the Japanese forced Korean women into sexual slavery. The textbooks describe the women as having been "drafted" to work, a euphemism that downplays the brutality of what actually occurred. Some Japanese textbooks dismiss an important Korean independence demonstration in 1919 as a "riot." In reality, Japanese soldiers attacked peaceful demonstrators, leaving roughly 6,000 dead and 15,000 wounded (Crampton 2002).

Although it may seem extreme that people are so enraged about how events are described in a textbook that they would resort to dismemberment, the protest affirms that textbooks are a significant tool of socialization in state-run education systems.

## **The Workplace**

Just as children spend much of their day at school, many U.S. adults at some point invest a significant amount of time at a place of employment. Although socialized into their culture since birth, workers require new socialization into a workplace, in terms of both material culture (such as how to operate the copy machine) and nonmaterial culture (such as whether it's okay to speak directly to the boss or how to share the refrigerator).

Different jobs require different types of socialization. In the past, many people worked a single job until retirement. Today, the trend is to switch jobs at least once a decade. Between the ages of eighteen and forty-six, the average baby boomer of the younger set held 11.3 different jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). This means that people must become socialized to, and socialized by, a variety of work environments.

## **Religion**

While some religions are informal institutions, here we focus on practices followed by formal institutions. Religion is an important avenue of socialization for many people. The United States is full of synagogues, temples, churches, mosques, and similar religious communities where people gather to worship and learn. Like other institutions, these places teach participants how to interact with the religion's material culture (like a mezuzah, a prayer rug, or a communion wafer). For some people, important ceremonies related to family structure—like marriage and birth—are connected to religious celebrations. Many religious institutions also uphold gender norms and contribute to their enforcement through socialization. From ceremonial rites of passage that reinforce the family unit to power dynamics that reinforce gender roles, organized religion fosters a shared set of socialized values that are passed on through society.

## **Government**

Although we do not think about it, many of the rites of passage people go through today are based on age norms established by the government. To be defined as an “adult” usually means being eighteen years old, the age at which a person becomes legally responsible for him- or herself. And sixty-five years old is the start of “old age” since most people become eligible for senior benefits at that point.

Each time we embark on one of these new categories—senior, adult, taxpayer—we must be socialized into our new role. Seniors must learn the ropes of Medicare, Social Security benefits, and senior shopping discounts. When U.S. males turn eighteen, they must register with the Selective Service System within thirty days to be entered into a database for possible military service. These government dictates mark the points at which we require socialization into a new category.

## **Mass Media**

**Mass media** distribute impersonal information to a wide audience, via television, newspapers, radio, and the Internet. With the average person spending over four hours a day in front of the television (and children averaging even more screen time), media greatly influences social norms (Roberts, Foehr, and Rideout 2005). People learn about objects of material culture (like new technology and transportation options), as well as nonmaterial culture—what is true (beliefs), what is important (values), and what is expected (norms).

### **Note:**

Girls and Movies



Some people are  
concerned about  
the way girls  
today are  
socialized into a  
“princess  
culture.” (Photo  
courtesy of  
Jørgen  
Håland/flickr)

Pixar is one of the largest producers of children’s movies in the world and has released large box office draws, such as *Toy Story*, *Cars*, *The Incredibles*, and *Up*. What Pixar has never before produced is a movie with a female lead role. This changed with Pixar’s newest movie *Brave*, which was released in 2012. Before *Brave*, women in Pixar served as supporting characters and love interests. In *Up*, for example, the only human female character dies within the first ten minutes of the film. For the millions of girls watching Pixar films, there are few strong characters or roles for them to relate to. If they do not see possible versions of themselves, they may come to view women as secondary to the lives of men.

The animated films of Pixar’s parent company, Disney, have many female lead roles. Disney is well known for films with female leads, such as *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Mulan*. Many of Disney’s movies star a female, and she is nearly always a princess figure. If she is not a princess to begin with, she typically ends the movie by marrying a



prince or, in the case of Mulan, a military general. Although not all “princesses” in Disney movies play a passive role in their lives, they typically find themselves needing to be rescued by a man, and the happy ending they all search for includes marriage.

Alongside this prevalence of princesses, many parents are expressing concern about the culture of princesses that Disney has created. Peggy Orenstein addresses this problem in her popular book, *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*. Orenstein wonders why every little girl is expected to be a “princess” and why pink has become an all-consuming obsession for many young girls. Another mother wondered what she did wrong when her three-year-old daughter refused to do “nonprincessy” things, including running and jumping. The effects of this princess culture can have negative consequences for girls throughout life. An early emphasis on beauty and sexiness can lead to eating disorders, low self-esteem, and risky sexual behavior among older girls.

What should we expect from Pixar’s new movie, the first starring a female character? Although *Brave* features a female lead, she is still a princess. Will this film offer any new type of role model for young girls? (O’Connor 2011; Barnes 2010; Rose 2011).

## Summary

Our direct interactions with social groups, like families and peers, teach us how others expect us to behave. Likewise, a society’s formal and informal institutions socialize its population. Schools, workplaces, and the media communicate and reinforce cultural norms and values.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Why are wealthy parents more likely than poor parents to socialize their children toward creativity and problem solving?

- a. Wealthy parents are socializing their children toward the skills of white-collar employment.
  - b. Wealthy parents are not concerned about their children rebelling against their rules.
  - c. Wealthy parents never engage in repetitive tasks.
  - d. Wealthy parents are more concerned with money than with a good education.
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

How do schools prepare children to one day enter the workforce?

- a. With a standardized curriculum
  - b. Through the hidden curriculum
  - c. By socializing them in teamwork
  - d. All of the above
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which one of the following is *not* a way people are socialized by religion?

- a. People learn the material culture of their religion.
- b. Life stages and roles are connected to religious celebration.

- c. An individual's personal internal experience of a divine being leads to their faith.
  - d. Places of worship provide a space for shared group experiences.
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Which of the following is a manifest function of schools?

- a. Understanding when to speak up and when to be silent
  - b. Learning to read and write
  - c. Following a schedule
  - d. Knowing locker room etiquette
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following is typically the earliest agent of socialization?

- a. School
  - b. Family
  - c. Mass media
  - d. Workplace
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

## Short Answer

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Do you think it is important that parents discuss gender roles with their young children, or is gender a topic better left for later? How do parents consider gender norms when buying their children books, movies, and toys? How do you believe they *should* consider it?

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Based on your observations, when are adolescents more likely to listen to their parents or to their peer groups when making decisions? What types of dilemmas lend themselves toward one social agent over another?

## Further Research

Most societies expect parents to socialize children into gender norms. See the controversy surrounding one Canadian couple's refusal to do so at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Baby-Storm>

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## **Glossary**

hidden curriculum

the informal teaching done in schools that socializes children to societal norms

peer group

a group made up of people who are similar in age and social status and who share interests

## Socialization Across the Life Course

- Explain how socialization occurs and recurs throughout life
- Understand how people are socialized into new roles at age-related transition points
- Describe when and how resocialization occurs

Socialization isn't a one-time or even a short-term event. We aren't "stamped" by some socialization machine as we move along a conveyor belt and thereby socialized once and for all. In fact, socialization is a lifelong process.

In the United States, socialization throughout the life course is determined greatly by age norms and "time-related rules and regulations" (Setterson 2002). As we grow older, we encounter age-related transition points that require socialization into a new role, such as becoming school age, entering the workforce, or retiring. For example, the U.S. government mandates that all children attend school. Child labor laws, enacted in the early twentieth century, nationally declared that childhood be a time of learning, not of labor. In countries such as Niger and Sierra Leone, however, child labor remains common and socially acceptable, with little legislation to regulate such practices (UNICEF 2012).

### **Note:**

Gap Year: How Different Societies Socialize Young Adults



Age transition points require socialization into new roles that can vary widely between societies. Young adults in America are encouraged to enter college or the workforce right away, students in England and India can take a year off like British Princes William and Harry did, while young men in Singapore and Switzerland must serve time in the military. (Photo courtesy of Charles McCain/flickr)

Have you ever heard of gap year? It's a common custom in British society. When teens finish their secondary schooling (aka high school in the United States), they often take a year "off" before entering college. Frequently, they might take a job, travel, or find other ways to experience another culture. Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, spent his gap year practicing survival skills in Belize, teaching English in Chile, and working on a dairy farm in the United Kingdom (Prince of Wales 2012a). His brother, Prince Harry, advocated for AIDS orphans in Africa and worked as a jackaroo (a novice ranch hand) in Australia (Prince of Wales 2012b). In the United States, this life transition point is socialized quite differently, and taking a year off is generally frowned upon. Instead, U.S. youth are encouraged to pick career paths by their mid-teens, to select a college and a major by their late teens, and to have completed all collegiate schooling or technical training for their career by their early twenties.



In yet other nations, this phase of the life course is tied into conscription, a term that describes compulsory military service. Egypt, Switzerland, Turkey, and Singapore all have this system in place. Youth in these nations (often only the males) are expected to undergo a number of months or years of military training and service.

How might your life be different if you lived in one of these other countries? Can you think of similar social norms—related to life age-transition points—that vary from country to country?

Many of life's social expectations are made clear and enforced on a cultural level. Through interacting with others and watching others interact, the expectation to fulfill roles becomes clear. While in elementary or middle school, the prospect of having a boyfriend or girlfriend may have been considered undesirable. The socialization that takes place in high school changes the expectation. By observing the excitement and importance attached to dating and relationships within the high school social scene, it quickly becomes apparent that one is now expected not only to be a child and a student, but also a significant other. Graduation from formal education—high school, vocational school, or college—involves socialization into a new set of expectations.

Educational expectations vary not only from culture to culture, but also from class to class. While middle- or upper-class families may expect their daughter or son to attend a four-year university after graduating from high school, other families may expect their child to immediately begin working full-time, as many within their family have done before.

**Note:**

**The Long Road to Adulthood for Millennials**

2008 was a year of financial upheaval in the United States. Rampant foreclosures and bank failures set off a chain of events sparking government distrust, loan defaults, and large-scale unemployment. How has this affected the United States's young adults?

Millennials, sometimes also called Gen Y, is a term that describes the generation born during the early eighties to early nineties. While the recession was in full swing, many were in the process of entering, attending, or graduating from high school and college. With employment prospects at historical lows, large numbers of graduates were unable to find work, sometimes moving back in with their parents and struggling to pay back student loans.

According to the *New York Times*, this economic stall is causing the Millennials to postpone what most Americans consider to be adulthood: “The traditional cycle seems to have gone off course, as young people remain untethered to romantic partners or to permanent homes, going back to school for lack of better options, traveling, avoiding commitments, competing ferociously for unpaid internships or temporary (and often grueling) Teach for America jobs, forestalling the beginning of adult life” (Henig 2010). The term Boomerang Generation describes recent college graduates, for whom lack of adequate employment upon college graduation often leads to a return to the parental home (Davidson, 2014).

The five milestones that define adulthood, Henig writes, are “completing school, leaving home, becoming financially independent, marrying, and having a child” (Henig 2010). These social milestones are taking longer for Millennials to attain, if they’re attained at all. Sociologists wonder what long-term impact this generation’s situation may have on society as a whole.

In the process of socialization, adulthood brings a new set of challenges and expectations, as well as new roles to fill. As the aging process moves forward, social roles continue to evolve. Pleasures of youth, such as wild nights out and serial dating, become less acceptable in the eyes of society. Responsibility and commitment are emphasized as pillars of adulthood, and men and women are expected to “settle down.” During this period, many people enter into marriage or a civil union, bring children into their families, and focus on a career path. They become partners or parents instead of students or significant others.

Just as young children pretend to be doctors or lawyers, play house, and dress up, adults also engage in **anticipatory socialization**, the preparation for future life roles. Examples would include a couple who cohabitate before marriage or soon-to-be parents who read infant care books and prepare their home for the new arrival. As part of anticipatory socialization, adults who are financially able begin planning for their retirement, saving money, and looking into future healthcare options. The transition into any new life role, despite the social structure that supports it, can be difficult.

## **Resocialization**

In the process of **resocialization**, old behaviors that were helpful in a previous role are removed because they are no longer of use. Resocialization is necessary when a person moves to a senior care center, goes to boarding school, or serves time in jail. In the new environment, the old rules no longer apply. The process of resocialization is typically more stressful than normal socialization because people have to unlearn behaviors that have become customary to them.

The most common way resocialization occurs is in a total institution where people are isolated from society and are forced to follow someone else's rules. A ship at sea is a total institution, as are religious convents, prisons, or some cult organizations. They are places cut off from a larger society. The 6.9 million Americans who lived in prisons and penitentiaries at the end of 2012 are also members of this type of institution (U.S. Department of Justice 2012). As another example, every branch of the military is a total institution.

Many individuals are resocialized into an institution through a two-part process. First, members entering an institution must leave behind their old identity through what is known as a degradation ceremony. In a **degradation ceremony**, new members lose the aspects of their old identity and are given new identities. The process is sometimes gentle. To enter a senior care home, an elderly person often must leave a family home and give up many belongings which were part of his or her long-standing identity. Though caretakers guide the elderly compassionately, the process

can still be one of loss. In many cults, this process is also gentle and happens in an environment of support and caring.

In other situations, the degradation ceremony can be more extreme. New prisoners lose freedom, rights (including the right to privacy), and personal belongings. When entering the army, soldiers have their hair cut short. Their old clothes are removed, and they wear matching uniforms. These individuals must give up any markers of their former identity in order to be resocialized into an identity as a “soldier.”



In basic training, members of the Air Force are taught to walk, move, and look like each other. (Photo courtesy of Staff Sergeant Desiree N. Palacios, U.S. Air Force/Wikimedia Commons)

After new members of an institution are stripped of their old identity, they build a new one that matches the new society. In the military, soldiers go through basic training together, where they learn new rules and bond with one another. They follow structured schedules set by their leaders. Soldiers must keep their areas clean for inspection, learn to march in correct formations, and salute when in the presence of superiors.

Learning to deal with life after having lived in a total institution requires yet another process of resocialization. In the U.S. military, soldiers learn discipline and a capacity for hard work. They set aside personal goals to achieve a mission, and they take pride in the accomplishments of their units. Many soldiers who leave the military transition these skills into excellent careers. Others find themselves lost upon leaving, uncertain about the outside world and what to do next. The process of resocialization to civilian life is not a simple one.

## Summary

Socialization is a lifelong process that reoccurs as we enter new phases of life, such as adulthood or senior age. Resocialization is a process that removes the socialization we have developed over time and replaces it with newly learned rules and roles. Because it involves removing old habits that have been built up, resocialization can be a stressful and difficult process.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Which of the following is *not* an age-related transition point when Americans must be socialized to new roles?

- a. Infancy
- b. School age
- c. Adulthood
- d. Senior citizen

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

A

### Exercise:

**Problem:**

Which of the following is true regarding U.S. socialization of recent high school graduates?

- a. They are expected to take a year “off” before college.
- b. They are required to serve in the military for one year.
- c. They are expected to enter college, trade school, or the workforce shortly after graduation.
- d. They are required to move away from their parents.

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**Solution:****Answer**

C

**Short Answer****Exercise:****Problem:**

Consider a person who is joining a sorority or fraternity, attending college or boarding school, or even a child beginning kindergarten. How is the process the student goes through a form of socialization? What new cultural behaviors must the student adapt to?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Do you think resocialization requires a total institution? Why, or why not? Can you think of any other ways someone could be resocialized?

**Further Research**

Homelessness is an endemic problem among veterans. Many soldiers leave the military or return from war and have difficulty resocializing into civilian life. Learn more about this problem at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/homeless> or <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/NCHV>

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## **Glossary**

anticipatory socialization

the way we prepare for future life roles

degradation ceremony

the process by which new members of a total institution lose aspects of their old identities and are given new ones

resocialization

the process by which old behaviors are removed and new behaviors are learned in their place



## Introduction to Culture

class="introduction"

People  
adhere to  
various rules  
and standards  
that are  
created and  
maintained in  
culture, such  
as giving a  
high five to  
someone.

(Photo  
courtesy of  
Chris  
Barnes/flickr  
)



What are the rules when you pass an acquaintance at school, work, in the grocery store, or in the mall? Generally, we do not consider all of the intricacies of the rules of behavior. We may simply say, "Hello!" and ask, "How was your weekend?" or some other trivial question meant to be a friendly greeting. Rarely do we physically embrace or even touch the individual. In fact, doing so may be viewed with scorn or distaste, since as people in the United States we have fairly rigid rules about personal space. However, we all adhere to various rules and standards that are created and maintained in culture. These rules and expectations have meaning, and there are ways in which you may violate this negotiation. Consider what would happen if you stopped and informed everyone who said, "Hi, how are you?" exactly how you were doing that day, and in detail. You would more than likely violate rules of culture and specifically greeting. Perhaps in a different culture the question would be more literal, and it may require a response. Or if you are having coffee with a good friend, perhaps that question warrants a more detailed response. These examples are all aspects of **culture**, which is shared beliefs, values, and practices, that participants must learn. Sociologically, we examine in what situation and context certain behavior is expected, and in which situations perhaps it is not. These rules are created and enforced by people who interact and share culture.

In everyday conversation, people rarely distinguish between the terms *culture* and *society*, but the terms have slightly different meanings, and the distinction is important to a sociologist. A **society** describes a group of people who share a community and a culture. By “community,” sociologists refer to a definable region—as small as a neighborhood (Brooklyn, or “the east side of town”), as large as a country (Ethiopia, the United States, or Nepal), or somewhere in between (in the United States, this might include someone who identifies with Southern or Midwestern society). To clarify, a culture represents the *beliefs and practices* of a group, while society represents the *people* who share those beliefs and practices. Neither society nor culture could exist without the other. In this chapter, we examine the relationship between culture and society in greater detail and pay special attention to the elements and forces that shape culture, including diversity and cultural changes. A final discussion touches on the different theoretical perspectives from which sociologists research culture.

## Glossary

culture

shared beliefs, values, and practices

society

people who live in a definable community and who share a culture

## What Is Culture?

- Differentiate between culture and society
- Explain material versus nonmaterial culture
- Discuss the concept of cultural universalism as it relates to society
- Compare and contrast ethnocentrism and xenocentrism

Humans are social creatures. Since the dawn of *Homo sapiens* nearly 250,000 years ago, people have grouped together into communities in order to survive. Living together, people form common habits and behaviors—from specific methods of childrearing to preferred techniques for obtaining food. In modern-day Paris, many people shop daily at outdoor markets to pick up what they need for their evening meal, buying cheese, meat, and vegetables from different specialty stalls. In the United States, the majority of people shop once a week at supermarkets, filling large carts to the brim. How would a Parisian perceive U.S. shopping behaviors that Americans take for granted?

Almost every human behavior, from shopping to marriage to expressions of feelings, is learned. In the United States, people tend to view marriage as a choice between two people, based on mutual feelings of love. In other nations and in other times, marriages have been arranged through an intricate process of interviews and negotiations between entire families, or in other cases, through a direct system, such as a “mail order bride.” To someone raised in New York City, the marriage customs of a family from Nigeria may seem strange or even wrong. Conversely, someone from a traditional Kolkata family might be perplexed with the idea of romantic love as the foundation for marriage and lifelong commitment. In other words, the way in which people view marriage depends largely on what they have been taught.

Behavior based on learned customs is not a bad thing. Being familiar with unwritten rules helps people feel secure and “normal.” Most people want to live their daily lives confident that their behaviors will not be challenged or disrupted. But even an action as seemingly simple as commuting to work evidences a great deal of cultural propriety.



How would a  
visitor from the  
suburban United  
States act and feel  
on this crowded  
Tokyo train?  
(Photo courtesy of  
simonglucas/flickr  
)

Take the case of going to work on public transportation. Whether people are commuting in Dublin, Cairo, Mumbai, or San Francisco, many behaviors will be the same, but significant differences also arise between cultures. Typically, a passenger will find a marked bus stop or station, wait for his bus or train, pay an agent before or after boarding, and quietly take a seat if one is available. But when boarding a bus in Cairo, passengers might have to run, because buses there often do not come to a full stop to take on patrons. Dublin bus riders would be expected to extend an arm to indicate that they want the bus to stop for them. And when boarding a commuter train in Mumbai, passengers must squeeze into overstuffed cars amid a lot of pushing and shoving on the crowded platforms. That kind of behavior would be considered the height of rudeness in the United States, but in Mumbai it reflects the daily challenges of getting around on a train system that is taxed to capacity.

In this example of commuting, culture consists of thoughts (expectations about personal space, for example) and tangible things (bus stops, trains, and seating capacity). **Material culture** refers to the objects or belongings of a group of people. Metro passes and bus tokens are part of material culture, as are automobiles, stores, and the physical structures where people worship. **Nonmaterial culture**, in contrast, consists of the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of a society. Material and nonmaterial aspects of culture are linked, and physical objects often symbolize cultural ideas. A metro pass is a material object, but it represents a form of nonmaterial culture, namely, capitalism, and the acceptance of paying for transportation. Clothing, hairstyles, and jewelry are part of material culture, but the appropriateness of wearing certain clothing for specific events reflects nonmaterial culture. A school building belongs to material culture, but the teaching methods and educational standards are part of education's nonmaterial culture. These material and nonmaterial aspects of culture can vary subtly from region to region. As people travel farther afield, moving from different regions to entirely different parts of the world, certain material and nonmaterial aspects of culture become dramatically unfamiliar. What happens when we encounter different cultures? As we interact with cultures other than our own, we become more aware of the differences and commonalities between others' worlds and our own.

## Cultural Universals

Often, a comparison of one culture to another will reveal obvious differences. But all cultures also share common elements. **Cultural universals** are patterns or traits that are globally common to all societies. One example of a cultural universal is the family unit: every human society recognizes a family structure that regulates sexual reproduction and the care of children. Even so, how that family unit is defined and how it functions vary. In many Asian cultures, for example, family members from all generations commonly live together in one household. In these cultures, young adults continue to live in the extended household family structure until they marry and join their spouse's household, or they may remain and raise their nuclear family within the extended family's homestead. In the United States, by contrast, individuals are expected to leave home and live independently for a period before forming a family unit that consists of

parents and their offspring. Other cultural universals include customs like funeral rites, weddings, and celebrations of births. However, each culture may view the ceremonies quite differently.

Anthropologist George Murdock first recognized the existence of cultural universals while studying systems of kinship around the world. Murdock found that cultural universals often revolve around basic human survival, such as finding food, clothing, and shelter, or around shared human experiences, such as birth and death or illness and healing. Through his research, Murdock identified other universals including language, the concept of personal names, and, interestingly, jokes. Humor seems to be a universal way to release tensions and create a sense of unity among people (Murdock 1949). Sociologists consider humor necessary to human interaction because it helps individuals navigate otherwise tense situations.

**Note:****Is Music a Cultural Universal?**

Imagine that you are sitting in a theater, watching a film. The movie opens with the heroine sitting on a park bench with a grim expression on her face. Cue the music. The first slow and mournful notes play in a minor key. As the melody continues, the heroine turns her head and sees a man walking toward her. The music slowly gets louder, and the dissonance of the chords sends a prickle of fear running down your spine. You sense that the heroine is in danger.

Now imagine that you are watching the same movie, but with a different soundtrack. As the scene opens, the music is soft and soothing, with a hint of sadness. You see the heroine sitting on the park bench and sense her loneliness. Suddenly, the music swells. The woman looks up and sees a man walking toward her. The music grows fuller, and the pace picks up. You feel your heart rise in your chest. This is a happy moment.

Music has the ability to evoke emotional responses. In television shows, movies, even commercials, music elicits laughter, sadness, or fear. Are these types of musical cues cultural universals?

In 2009, a team of psychologists, led by Thomas Fritz of the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig, Germany,

studied people's reactions to music that they'd never heard (Fritz et al. 2009). The research team traveled to Cameroon, Africa, and asked Mafa tribal members to listen to Western music. The tribe, isolated from Western culture, had never been exposed to Western culture and had no context or experience within which to interpret its music. Even so, as the tribal members listened to a Western piano piece, they were able to recognize three basic emotions: happiness, sadness, and fear. Music, it turns out, is a sort of universal language.

Researchers also found that music can foster a sense of wholeness within a group. In fact, scientists who study the evolution of language have concluded that originally language (an established component of group identity) and music were one (Darwin 1871). Additionally, since music is largely nonverbal, the sounds of music can cross societal boundaries more easily than words. Music allows people to make connections, where language might be a more difficult barricade. As Fritz and his team found, music and the emotions it conveys can be cultural universals.

## **Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism**

Despite how much humans have in common, cultural differences are far more prevalent than cultural universals. For example, while all cultures have language, analysis of particular language structures and conversational etiquette reveal tremendous differences. In some Middle Eastern cultures, it is common to stand close to others in conversation. North Americans keep more distance and maintain a large "personal space." Even something as simple as eating and drinking varies greatly from culture to culture. If your professor comes into an early morning class holding a mug of liquid, what do you assume she is drinking? In the United States, it's most likely filled with coffee, not Earl Grey tea, a favorite in England, or Yak Butter tea, a staple in Tibet.

The way cuisines vary across cultures fascinates many people. Some travelers pride themselves on their willingness to try unfamiliar foods, like celebrated food writer Anthony Bourdain, while others return home expressing gratitude for their native culture's fare. Often, people in the



United States express disgust at other cultures' cuisine and think that it's gross to eat meat from a dog or guinea pig, for example, while they don't question their own habit of eating cows or pigs. Such attitudes are an example of **ethnocentrism**, or evaluating and judging another culture based on how it compares to one's own cultural norms. Ethnocentrism, as sociologist William Graham Sumner (1906) described the term, involves a belief or attitude that one's own culture is better than all others. Almost everyone is a little bit ethnocentric. For example, Americans tend to say that people from England drive on the "wrong" side of the road, rather than on the "other" side. Someone from a country where dog meat is standard fare might find it off-putting to see a dog in a French restaurant—not on the menu, but as a pet and patron's companion. A good example of ethnocentrism is referring to parts of Asia as the "Far East." One might question, "Far east of where?"

A high level of appreciation for one's own culture can be healthy; a shared sense of community pride, for example, connects people in a society. But ethnocentrism can lead to disdain or dislike for other cultures and could cause misunderstanding and conflict. People with the best intentions sometimes travel to a society to "help" its people, because they see them as uneducated or backward—essentially inferior. In reality, these travelers are guilty of **cultural imperialism**, the deliberate imposition of one's own cultural values on another culture. Europe's colonial expansion, begun in the sixteenth century, was often accompanied by a severe cultural imperialism. European colonizers often viewed the people in the lands they colonized as uncultured savages who were in need of European governance, dress, religion, and other cultural practices. A more modern example of cultural imperialism may include the work of international aid agencies who introduce agricultural methods and plant species from developed countries while overlooking indigenous varieties and agricultural approaches that are better suited to the particular region.

Ethnocentrism can be so strong that when confronted with all of the differences of a new culture, one may experience disorientation and frustration. In sociology, we call this **culture shock**. A traveler from Chicago might find the nightly silence of rural Montana unsettling, not peaceful. An exchange student from China might be annoyed by the

constant interruptions in class as other students ask questions—a practice that is considered rude in China. Perhaps the Chicago traveler was initially captivated with Montana’s quiet beauty and the Chinese student was originally excited to see a U.S.-style classroom firsthand. But as they experience unanticipated differences from their own culture, their excitement gives way to discomfort and doubts about how to behave appropriately in the new situation. Eventually, as people learn more about a culture, they recover from culture shock.

Culture shock may appear because people aren’t always expecting cultural differences. Anthropologist Ken Barger (1971) discovered this when he conducted a participatory observation in an Inuit community in the Canadian Arctic. Originally from Indiana, Barger hesitated when invited to join a local snowshoe race. He knew he’d never hold his own against these experts. Sure enough, he finished last, to his mortification. But the tribal members congratulated him, saying, “You really tried!” In Barger’s own culture, he had learned to value victory. To the Inuit people, winning was enjoyable, but their culture valued survival skills essential to their environment: how hard someone tried could mean the difference between life and death. Over the course of his stay, Barger participated in caribou hunts, learned how to take shelter in winter storms, and sometimes went days with little or no food to share among tribal members. Trying hard and working together, two nonmaterial values, were indeed much more important than winning.

During his time with the Inuit tribe, Barger learned to engage in cultural relativism. **Cultural relativism** is the practice of assessing a culture by its own standards rather than viewing it through the lens of one’s own culture. Practicing cultural relativism requires an open mind and a willingness to consider, and even adapt to, new values and norms. However, indiscriminately embracing everything about a new culture is not always possible. Even the most culturally relativist people from egalitarian societies—ones in which women have political rights and control over their own bodies—would question whether the widespread practice of female genital mutilation in countries such as Ethiopia and Sudan should be accepted as a part of cultural tradition. Sociologists attempting to engage in

cultural relativism, then, may struggle to reconcile aspects of their own culture with aspects of a culture that they are studying.

Sometimes when people attempt to rectify feelings of ethnocentrism and develop cultural relativism, they swing too far to the other end of the spectrum. **Xenocentrism** is the opposite of ethnocentrism, and refers to the belief that another culture is superior to one's own. (The Greek root word *xeno*, pronounced "ZEE-no," means "stranger" or "foreign guest.") An exchange student who goes home after a semester abroad or a sociologist who returns from the field may find it difficult to associate with the values of their own culture after having experienced what they deem a more upright or nobler way of living.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for sociologists studying different cultures is the matter of keeping a perspective. It is impossible for anyone to keep all cultural biases at bay; the best we can do is strive to be aware of them. Pride in one's own culture doesn't have to lead to imposing its values on others. And an appreciation for another culture shouldn't preclude individuals from studying it with a critical eye.

**Note:**

**Overcoming Culture Shock**

During her summer vacation, Caitlin flew from Chicago to Madrid to visit Maria, the exchange student she'd befriended the previous semester. In the airport, she heard rapid, musical Spanish being spoken all around her. Exciting as it was, she felt isolated and disconnected. Maria's mother kissed Caitlin on both cheeks when she greeted her. Her imposing father kept his distance. Caitlin was half asleep by the time supper was served—at 10 p.m.! Maria's family sat at the table for hours, speaking loudly, gesturing, and arguing about politics, a taboo dinner subject in Caitlin's house. They served wine and toasted their honored guest. Caitlin had trouble interpreting her hosts' facial expressions, and didn't realize she should make the next toast. That night, Caitlin crawled into a strange bed, wishing she hadn't come. She missed her home and felt overwhelmed by the new customs, language, and surroundings. She'd studied Spanish in school for years—why hadn't it prepared her for this?

What Caitlin hadn't realized was that people depend not only on spoken words but also on subtle cues like gestures and facial expressions, to communicate. Cultural norms accompany even the smallest nonverbal signals (DuBois 1951). They help people know when to shake hands, where to sit, how to converse, and even when to laugh. We relate to others through a shared set of cultural norms, and ordinarily, we take them for granted.

For this reason, culture shock is often associated with traveling abroad, although it can happen in one's own country, state, or even hometown. Anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1960) is credited with first coining the term "culture shock." In his studies, Oberg found that most people found encountering a new culture to be exciting at first. But bit by bit, they became stressed by interacting with people from a different culture who spoke another language and used different regional expressions. There was new food to digest, new daily schedules to follow, and new rules of etiquette to learn. Living with this constant stress can make people feel incompetent and insecure. People react to frustration in a new culture, Oberg found, by initially rejecting it and glorifying one's own culture. An American visiting Italy might long for a "real" pizza or complain about the unsafe driving habits of Italians compared to people in the United States. It helps to remember that culture is learned. Everyone is ethnocentric to an extent, and identifying with one's own country is natural.

Caitlin's shock was minor compared to that of her friends Dayar and Mahlika, a Turkish couple living in married student housing on campus. And it was nothing like that of her classmate Sanai. Sanai had been forced to flee war-torn Bosnia with her family when she was fifteen. After two weeks in Spain, Caitlin had developed a bit more compassion and understanding for what those people had gone through. She understood that adjusting to a new culture takes time. It can take weeks or months to recover from culture shock, and it can take years to fully adjust to living in a new culture.

By the end of Caitlin's trip, she'd made new lifelong friends. She'd stepped out of her comfort zone. She'd learned a lot about Spain, but she'd also discovered a lot about herself and her own culture.



Experiencing new cultures offers an opportunity to practice cultural relativism. (Photo courtesy of OledSidorenko/flickr )

## Summary

Though “society” and “culture” are often used interchangeably, they have different meanings. A society is a group of people sharing a community and culture. Culture generally describes the shared behaviors and beliefs of these people, and includes material and nonmaterial elements.. Our experience of cultural difference is influenced by our ethnocentrism and xenocentrism. Sociologists try to practice cultural relativism.

## Section Quiz

**Exercise:****Problem:**

The terms \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are often used interchangeably, but have nuances that differentiate them.

- a. imperialism and relativism
- b. culture and society
- c. society and ethnocentrism
- d. ethnocentrism and xenocentrism

---

**Solution:****Answer**

B

**Exercise:****Problem:**

The American flag is a material object that denotes the United States of America; however, there are certain connotations that many associate with the flag, like bravery and freedom. In this example, what are bravery and freedom?

- a. Symbols
- b. Language
- c. Material culture
- d. Nonmaterial culture

---

**Solution:****Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

The belief that one's culture is inferior to another culture is called:

- a. ethnocentrism
- b. nationalism
- c. xenocentrism
- d. imperialism

---

**Solution:****Answer**

C

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Rodney and Elise are U.S. students studying abroad in Italy. When they are introduced to their host families, the families kiss them on both cheeks. When Rodney's host brother introduces himself and kisses Rodney on both cheeks, Rodney pulls back in surprise. Where he is from, unless they are romantically involved, men do not kiss one another. This is an example of:

- a. culture shock
- b. imperialism
- c. ethnocentrism
- d. xenocentrism

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Most cultures have been found to identify laughter as a sign of humor, joy, or pleasure. Likewise, most cultures recognize music in some form. Music and laughter are examples of:

- a. relativism
- b. ethnocentrism
- c. xenocentrism
- d. universalism

---

**Solution:****Answer**

D

**Short Answer****Exercise:****Problem:**

Examine the difference between material and nonmaterial culture in your world. Identify ten objects that are part of your regular cultural experience. For each, then identify what aspects of nonmaterial culture (values and beliefs) that these objects represent. What has this exercise revealed to you about your culture?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Do you feel that feelings of ethnocentricity or xenocentricity are more prevalent in U.S. culture? Why do you believe this? What issues or events might inform this?



## Further Research

In January 2011, a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America presented evidence indicating that the hormone oxytocin could regulate and manage instances of ethnocentrism. Read the full article here:

<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/oxytocin>

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## **Glossary**

cultural imperialism

the deliberate imposition of one's own cultural values on another culture

cultural relativism

the practice of assessing a culture by its own standards, and not in comparison to another culture

cultural universals

patterns or traits that are globally common to all societies

culture shock

an experience of personal disorientation when confronted with an unfamiliar way of life

ethnocentrism

the practice of evaluating another culture according to the standards of one's own culture

material culture

the objects or belongings of a group of people

nonmaterial culture

the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of a society

xenocentrism

a belief that another culture is superior to one's own

## Elements of Culture

- Understand how values and beliefs differ from norms
- Explain the significance of symbols and language to a culture
- Explain the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis
- Discuss the role of social control within culture

## Values and Beliefs

The first, and perhaps most crucial, elements of culture we will discuss are its values and beliefs. **Values** are a culture's standard for discerning what is good and just in society. Values are deeply embedded and critical for transmitting and teaching a culture's beliefs. **Beliefs** are the tenets or convictions that people hold to be true. Individuals in a society have specific beliefs, but they also share collective values. To illustrate the difference, Americans commonly believe in the American Dream—that anyone who works hard enough will be successful and wealthy. Underlying this belief is the American value that wealth is good and important.

Values help shape a society by suggesting what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, sought or avoided. Consider the value that the United States places upon youth. Children represent innocence and purity, while a youthful adult appearance signifies sexuality. Shaped by this value, individuals spend millions of dollars each year on cosmetic products and surgeries to look young and beautiful. The United States also has an individualistic culture, meaning people place a high value on individuality and independence. In contrast, many other cultures are collectivist, meaning the welfare of the group and group relationships are a primary value.

Living up to a culture's values can be difficult. It's easy to value good health, but it's hard to quit smoking. Marital monogamy is valued, but many spouses engage in infidelity. Cultural diversity and equal opportunities for all people are valued in the United States, yet the country's highest political offices have been dominated by white men.

Values often suggest how people should behave, but they don't accurately reflect how people do behave. Values portray an **ideal culture**, the

standards society would like to embrace and live up to. But ideal culture differs from **real culture**, the way society actually is, based on what occurs and exists. In an ideal culture, there would be no traffic accidents, murders, poverty, or racial tension. But in real culture, police officers, lawmakers, educators, and social workers constantly strive to prevent or repair those accidents, crimes, and injustices. American teenagers are encouraged to value celibacy. However, the number of unplanned pregnancies among teens reveals that not only is the ideal hard to live up to, but the value alone is not enough to spare teenagers the potential consequences of having sex.

One way societies strive to put values into action is through rewards, sanctions, and punishments. When people observe the norms of society and uphold its values, they are often rewarded. A boy who helps an elderly woman board a bus may receive a smile and a “thank you.” A business manager who raises profit margins may receive a quarterly bonus. People **sanction** certain behaviors by giving their support, approval, or permission, or by instilling formal actions of disapproval and nonsupport. Sanctions are a form of **social control**, a way to encourage conformity to cultural norms. Sometimes people conform to norms in anticipation or expectation of positive sanctions: good grades, for instance, may mean praise from parents and teachers. From a criminal justice perspective, properly used social control is also inexpensive crime control. Utilizing social control approaches pushes most people to conform to societal rules, regardless of whether authority figures (such as law enforcement) are present.

When people go against a society’s values, they are punished. A boy who shoves an elderly woman aside to board the bus first may receive frowns or even a scolding from other passengers. A business manager who drives away customers will likely be fired. Breaking norms and rejecting values can lead to cultural sanctions such as earning a negative label—lazy, no-good bum—or to legal sanctions, such as traffic tickets, fines, or imprisonment.

Values are not static; they vary across time and between groups as people evaluate, debate, and change collective societal beliefs. Values also vary from culture to culture. For example, cultures differ in their values about what kinds of physical closeness are appropriate in public. It’s rare to see

two male friends or coworkers holding hands in the United States where that behavior often symbolizes romantic feelings. But in many nations, masculine physical intimacy is considered natural in public. This difference in cultural values came to light when people reacted to photos of former president George W. Bush holding hands with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia in 2005. A simple gesture, such as hand-holding, carries great symbolic differences across cultures.



In many parts of Africa and the Middle East, it is considered normal for men to hold hands in friendship. How would Americans react to these two soldiers? (Photo courtesy of Geordie Mott/Wikimedia Commons)

## Norms

So far, the examples in this chapter have often described how people are expected to behave in certain situations—for example, when buying food or boarding a bus. These examples describe the visible and invisible rules of conduct through which societies are structured, or what sociologists call

norms. **Norms** define how to behave in accordance with what a society has defined as good, right, and important, and most members of the society adhere to them.

**Formal norms** are established, written rules. They are behaviors worked out and agreed upon in order to suit and serve the most people. Laws are formal norms, but so are employee manuals, college entrance exam requirements, and “no running” signs at swimming pools. Formal norms are the most specific and clearly stated of the various types of norms, and they are the most strictly enforced. But even formal norms are enforced to varying degrees and are reflected in cultural values.

For example, money is highly valued in the United States, so monetary crimes are punished. It’s against the law to rob a bank, and banks go to great lengths to prevent such crimes. People safeguard valuable possessions and install antitheft devices to protect homes and cars. A less strictly enforced social norm is driving while intoxicated. While it’s against the law to drive drunk, drinking is for the most part an acceptable social behavior. And though there are laws to punish drunk driving, there are few systems in place to prevent the crime. These examples show a range of enforcement in formal norms.

There are plenty of formal norms, but the list of **informal norms**—casual behaviors that are generally and widely conformed to—is longer. People learn informal norms by observation, imitation, and general socialization. Some informal norms are taught directly—“Kiss your Aunt Edna” or “Use your napkin”—while others are learned by observation, including observations of the consequences when someone else violates a norm. But although informal norms define personal interactions, they extend into other systems as well. In the United States, there are informal norms regarding behavior at fast food restaurants. Customers line up to order their food and leave when they are done. They don’t sit down at a table with strangers, sing loudly as they prepare their condiments, or nap in a booth. Most people don’t commit even benign breaches of informal norms. Informal norms dictate appropriate behaviors without the need of written rules.

**Note:****Breaching Experiments**

Sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1917–2011) studied people's customs in order to find out how societal rules and norms not only influenced behavior but also shaped social order. He believed that members of society together create a social order (Weber 2011). His resulting book, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, published in 1967, discusses people's assumptions about the social makeup of their communities.

One of Garfinkel's research methods was known as a “breaching experiment,” in which the researcher behaves in a socially awkward manner in order to test the sociological concepts of social norms and conformity. The participants are not aware an experiment is in progress. If the breach is successful, however, these “innocent bystanders” will respond in some way. For example, if the experimenter is, say, a man in a business suit, and he skips down the sidewalk or hops on one foot, the passersby are likely to stare at him with surprised expressions on their faces. But the experimenter does not simply “act weird” in public. Rather, the point is to deviate from a specific social norm in a small way, to subtly break some form of social etiquette, and see what happens.

To conduct his ethnomethodology, Garfinkel deliberately imposed strange behaviors on unknowing people. Then he observed their responses. He suspected that odd behaviors would shatter conventional expectations, but he wasn't sure how. For example, he set up a simple game of tic-tac-toe. One player was asked beforehand to mark Xs and Os not in the boxes but on the lines dividing the spaces instead. The other player, in the dark about the study, was flabbergasted and did not know how to continue. The second player's reactions of outrage, anger, puzzlement, or other emotions illustrated the existence of cultural norms that constitute social life. These cultural norms play an important role. They let us know how to behave around each other and how to feel comfortable in our community.

There are many rules about speaking with strangers in public. It's OK to tell a woman you like her shoes. It's not OK to ask if you can try them on. It's OK to stand in line behind someone at the ATM. It's not OK to look over his shoulder as he makes his transaction. It's OK to sit beside someone on a crowded bus. It's weird to sit beside a stranger in a half-empty bus.

For some breaches, the researcher directly engages with innocent bystanders. An experimenter might strike up a conversation in a public bathroom, where it's common to respect each other's privacy so fiercely as to ignore other people's presence. In a grocery store, an experimenter might take a food item out of another person's grocery cart, saying, "That looks good! I think I'll try it." An experimenter might sit down at a table with others in a fast food restaurant or follow someone around a museum and study the same paintings. In those cases, the bystanders are pressured to respond, and their discomfort illustrates how much we depend on social norms. Breaching experiments uncover and explore the many unwritten social rules we live by.

Norms may be further classified as either **mores** or **folkways**. **Mores** (mor-ays) are norms that embody the moral views and principles of a group. Violating them can have serious consequences. The strongest mores are legally protected with laws or other formal norms. In the United States, for instance, murder is considered immoral, and it's punishable by law (a formal norm). But more often, mores are judged and guarded by public sentiment (an informal norm). People who violate mores are seen as shameful. They can even be shunned or banned from some groups. The mores of the U.S. school system require that a student's writing be in the student's own words or use special forms (such as quotation marks and a whole system of citation) for crediting other writers. Writing another person's words as if they are one's own has a name—plagiarism. The consequences for violating this norm are severe and usually result in expulsion.

Unlike mores, **folkways** are norms without any moral underpinnings. Rather, folkways direct appropriate behavior in the day-to-day practices and expressions of a culture. They indicate whether to shake hands or kiss on the cheek when greeting another person. They specify whether to wear a tie and blazer or a T-shirt and sandals to an event. In Canada, women can smile and say hello to men on the street. In Egypt, that's not acceptable. In regions in the southern United States, bumping into an acquaintance means stopping to chat. It's considered rude not to, no matter how busy one is. In



other regions, people guard their privacy and value time efficiency. A simple nod of the head is enough. Other accepted folkways in the United States may include holding the door open for a stranger or giving someone a gift on their birthday. The rules regarding these folkways may change from culture to culture.

Many folkways are actions we take for granted. People need to act without thinking in order to get seamlessly through daily routines; they can't stop and analyze every action (Sumner 1906). Those who experience culture shock may find that it subsides as they learn the new culture's folkways and are able to move through their daily routines more smoothly. Folkways might be small manners, learned by observation and imitated, but they are by no means trivial. Like mores and laws, these norms help people negotiate their daily lives within a given culture.

## **Symbols and Language**

Humans, consciously and subconsciously, are always striving to make sense of their surrounding world. **Symbols**—such as gestures, signs, objects, signals, and words—help people understand that world. They provide clues to understanding experiences by conveying recognizable meanings that are shared by societies.

The world is filled with symbols. Sports uniforms, company logos, and traffic signs are symbols. In some cultures, a gold ring is a symbol of marriage. Some symbols are highly functional; stop signs, for instance, provide useful instruction. As physical objects, they belong to material culture, but because they function as symbols, they also convey nonmaterial cultural meanings. Some symbols are valuable only in what they represent. Trophies, blue ribbons, or gold medals, for example, serve no other purpose than to represent accomplishments. But many objects have both material and nonmaterial symbolic value.

A police officer's badge and uniform are symbols of authority and law enforcement. The sight of an officer in uniform or a squad car triggers reassurance in some citizens, and annoyance, fear, or anger in others.

It's easy to take symbols for granted. Few people challenge or even think about stick figure signs on the doors of public bathrooms. But those figures are more than just symbols that tell men and women which bathrooms to use. They also uphold the value, in the United States, that public restrooms should be gender exclusive. Even though stalls are relatively private, most places don't offer unisex bathrooms.



Some road signs are universal.  
But how would you interpret  
the signage on the right? (Photo  
(a) courtesy of Andrew  
Bain/flickr; Photo (b) courtesy  
of HonzaSoukup/flickr)

Symbols often get noticed when they are out of context. Used unconventionally, they convey strong messages. A stop sign on the door of a corporation makes a political statement, as does a camouflage military jacket worn in an antiwar protest. Together, the semaphore signals for “N” and “D” represent nuclear disarmament—and form the well-known peace sign (Westcott 2008). Today, some college students have taken to wearing pajamas and bedroom slippers to class, clothing that was formerly associated only with privacy and bedtime. Though students might deny it, the outfit defies traditional cultural norms and makes a statement.

Even the destruction of symbols is symbolic. Effigies representing public figures are burned to demonstrate anger at certain leaders. In 1989, crowds tore down the Berlin Wall, a decades-old symbol of the division between East and West Germany, communism, and capitalism.

While different cultures have varying systems of symbols, one symbol is common to all: language. **Language** is a symbolic system through which people communicate and through which culture is transmitted. Some languages contain a system of symbols used for written communication, while others rely on only spoken communication and nonverbal actions.

Societies often share a single language, and many languages contain the same basic elements. An alphabet is a written system made of symbolic shapes that refer to spoken sound. Taken together, these symbols convey specific meanings. The English alphabet uses a combination of twenty-six letters to create words; these twenty-six letters make up over 600,000 recognized English words (OED Online 2011).

Rules for speaking and writing vary even within cultures, most notably by region. Do you refer to a can of carbonated liquid as “soda,” “pop,” or “Coke”? Is a household entertainment room a “family room,” “rec room,” or “den”? When leaving a restaurant, do you ask your server for a “check,” the “ticket,” or your “bill”?

Language is constantly evolving as societies create new ideas. In this age of technology, people have adapted almost instantly to new nouns such as “e-mail” and “Internet,” and verbs such as “downloading,” “texting,” and “blogging.” Twenty years ago, the general public would have considered these nonsense words.

Even while it constantly evolves, language continues to shape our reality. This insight was established in the 1920s by two linguists, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf. They believed that reality is culturally determined, and that any interpretation of reality is based on a society’s language. To prove this point, the sociologists argued that every language has words or expressions specific to that language. In the United States, for example, the number thirteen is associated with bad luck. In Japan, however, the number

four is considered unlucky, since it is pronounced similarly to the Japanese word for “death.”

The **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** is based on the idea that people experience their world through their language, and that they therefore understand their world through the culture embedded in their language. The hypothesis, which has also been called linguistic relativity, states that language shapes thought (Swoyer 2003). Studies have shown, for instance, that unless people have access to the word “ambivalent,” they don’t recognize an experience of uncertainty from having conflicting positive and negative feelings about one issue. Essentially, the hypothesis argues, if a person can’t describe the experience, the person is not having the experience.

In addition to using language, people communicate without words. Nonverbal communication is symbolic, and, as in the case of language, much of it is learned through one’s culture. Some gestures are nearly universal: smiles often represent joy, and crying often represents sadness. Other nonverbal symbols vary across cultural contexts in their meaning. A thumbs-up, for example, indicates positive reinforcement in the United States, whereas in Russia and Australia, it is an offensive curse (Passero 2002). Other gestures vary in meaning depending on the situation and the person. A wave of the hand can mean many things, depending on how it’s done and for whom. It may mean “hello,” “goodbye,” “no thank you,” or “I’m royalty.” Winks convey a variety of messages, including “We have a secret,” “I’m only kidding,” or “I’m attracted to you.” From a distance, a person can understand the emotional gist of two people in conversation just by watching their body language and facial expressions. Furrowed brows and folded arms indicate a serious topic, possibly an argument. Smiles, with heads lifted and arms open, suggest a lighthearted, friendly chat.

**Note:****Is the United States Bilingual?**

In 1991, when she was six years old, Lucy Alvarez attended a school that allowed for the use of both English and Spanish. Lucy’s teacher was bilingual, the librarian offered bilingual books, and many of the school staff spoke both Spanish and English. Lucy and many of her classmates

who spoke only Spanish at home were lucky. According to the U.S. Census, 13.8 percent of U.S. residents speak a non-English language at home. That's a significant figure, but not enough to ensure that Lucy would be encouraged to use her native language in school (Mount 2010).

Lucy's parents, who moved to Texas from Mexico, struggled under the pressure to speak English. Lucy might easily have gotten lost and left behind if she'd felt the same pressure in school. In 2008, researchers from Johns Hopkins University conducted a series of studies on the effects of bilingual education (Slavin et al. 2008). They found that students taught in both their native tongue and English make better progress than those taught only in English.

Technically, the United States has no official language. But many believe English to be the rightful language of the United States, and over thirty states have passed laws specifying English as the official tongue.

Proponents of English-only laws suggest that a national ruling will save money on translation, printing, and human resource costs, including funding for bilingual teachers. They argue that setting English as the official language will encourage non-English speakers to learn English faster and adapt to the culture of the United States more easily (Mount 2010).

Groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) oppose making English the official language and claim that it violates the rights of non-English speakers. English-only laws, they believe, deny the reality of our nation's diversity and unfairly target Latinos and Asians. They point to the fact that much of the debate on this topic has risen since 1970, a time when the United States experienced new waves of immigration from Asia and Mexico.

Today, a lot of product information gets written in multiple languages. Enter a store like Home Depot and you'll find signs in both English and Spanish. Buy a children's product, and the safety warnings could be presented in multiple languages. While marketers are financially motivated to reach the largest number of consumers possible, this trend also may help people acclimate to a culture of bilingualism.

Studies show that most U.S. immigrants eventually abandon their native tongues and become fluent in English. Bilingual education helps with that transition. Today, Lucy Alvarez is an ambitious and high-achieving college student. Fluent in both English and Spanish, Lucy is studying law

enforcement—a field that seeks bilingual employees. The same bilingualism that contributed to her success in grade school will help her thrive professionally as a law officer serving her community.



Nowadays, many signs—on streets and in stores—include both English and Spanish. What effect does this have on members of society? What effect does it have on our culture? (Photo courtesy of [istolethetv/flickr](#))

## Summary

A culture consists of many elements, such as the values and beliefs of its society. Culture is also governed by norms, including laws, mores, and folkways. The symbols and language of a society are key to developing and conveying culture.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** A nation's flag is:

- a. A symbol
- b. A value
- c. A culture
- d. A folkway

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

The existence of social norms, both formal and informal, is one of the main things that inform \_\_\_\_\_, otherwise known as a way to encourage social conformity.

- a. values
- b. sanctions
- c. social control
- d. mores

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** The biggest difference between mores and folkways is that

- a. mores are primarily linked to morality, whereas folkways are primarily linked to being commonplace within a culture

- b. mores are absolute, whereas folkways are temporary
- c. mores refer to material culture, whereas folkways refer to nonmaterial culture
- d. mores refer to nonmaterial culture, whereas folkways refer to material culture

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

The notion that people cannot feel or experience something that they do not have a word for can be explained by:

- a. linguistics
- b. Sapir-Whorf
- c. Ethnographic imagery
- d. bilingualism

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Cultural sanctions can also be viewed as ways that society:

- a. Establishes leaders
  - b. Determines language
  - c. Regulates behavior
  - d. Determines laws
-



**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

## Short Answer

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What do you think of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis? Do you agree or disagree with it? Cite examples or research to support your point of view.

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

How do you think your culture would exist if there were no such thing as a social “norm”? Do you think chaos would ensue or relative peace could be kept? Explain.

## Further Research

The science-fiction novel, *Babel-17*, by Samuel R. Delaney was based upon the principles of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Read an excerpt from the novel here: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Babel-17>

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## Glossary

beliefs

tenets or convictions that people hold to be true

folkways

direct, appropriate behavior in the day-to-day practices and expressions of a culture

formal norms

established, written rules

ideal culture

the standards a society would like to embrace and live up to

informal norms

casual behaviors that are generally and widely conformed to

language

a symbolic system of communication

mores

the moral views and principles of a group

norms

the visible and invisible rules of conduct through which societies are structured

real culture

the way society really is based on what actually occurs and exists

sanctions

a way to authorize or formally disapprove of certain behaviors

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

the way that people understand the world based on their form of language

social control

a way to encourage conformity to cultural norms

symbols

gestures or objects that have meanings associated with them that are recognized by people who share a culture

values

a culture's standard for discerning what is good and just in society

## Pop Culture, Subculture, and Cultural Change

- Discuss the roles of both high culture and pop culture within society
- Differentiate between subculture and counterculture
- Explain the role of innovation, invention, and discovery in culture
- Understand the role of cultural lag and globalization in cultural change

It may seem obvious that there are a multitude of cultural differences between societies in the world. After all, we can easily see that people vary from one society to the next. It's natural that a young woman from rural Kenya would have a very different view of the world from an elderly man in Mumbai—one of the most populated cities in the world. Additionally, each culture has its own internal variations. Sometimes the differences between cultures are not nearly as large as the differences inside cultures.

## High Culture and Popular Culture

Do you prefer listening to opera or hip hop music? Do you like watching horse racing or NASCAR? Do you read books of poetry or celebrity magazines? In each pair, one type of entertainment is considered high-brow and the other low-brow. Sociologists use the term **high culture** to describe the pattern of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in the highest class segments of a society. People often associate high culture with intellectualism, political power, and prestige. In America, high culture also tends to be associated with wealth. Events considered high culture can be expensive and formal—attending a ballet, seeing a play, or listening to a live symphony performance.

The term **popular culture** refers to the pattern of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in mainstream society. Popular culture events might include a parade, a baseball game, or the season finale of a television show. Rock and pop music—"pop" is short for "popular"—are part of popular culture. Popular culture is often expressed and spread via commercial media such as radio, television, movies, the music industry, publishers, and corporate-run websites. Unlike high culture, popular culture is known and accessible to most people. You can share a discussion of favorite football teams with a new coworker or comment on *American Idol* when making

small talk in line at the grocery store. But if you tried to launch into a deep discussion on the classical Greek play *Antigone*, few members of U.S. society today would be familiar with it.

Although high culture may be viewed as superior to popular culture, the labels of high culture and popular culture vary over time and place. Shakespearean plays, considered pop culture when they were written, are now part of our society's high culture. Five hundred years from now, will our descendants associate *Breaking Bad* with the cultural elite?

## Subculture and Counterculture

A **subculture** is just what it sounds like—a smaller cultural group within a larger culture; people of a subculture are part of the larger culture but also share a specific identity within a smaller group.

Thousands of subcultures exist within the United States. Ethnic and racial groups share the language, food, and customs of their heritage. Other subcultures are united by shared experiences. Biker culture revolves around a dedication to motorcycles. Some subcultures are formed by members who possess traits or preferences that differ from the majority of a society's population. The body modification community embraces aesthetic additions to the human body, such as tattoos, piercings, and certain forms of plastic surgery. In the United States, adolescents often form subcultures to develop a shared youth identity. Alcoholics Anonymous offers support to those suffering from alcoholism. But even as members of a subculture band together, they still identify with and participate in the larger society.

Sociologists distinguish subcultures from **countercultures**, which are a type of subculture that rejects some of the larger culture's norms and values. In contrast to subcultures, which operate relatively smoothly within the larger society, countercultures might actively defy larger society by developing their own set of rules and norms to live by, sometimes even creating communities that operate outside of greater society.

Cults, a word derived from culture, are also considered counterculture group. The group "Yearning for Zion" (YFZ) in Eldorado, Texas, existed

outside the mainstream and the limelight, until its leader was accused of statutory rape and underage marriage. The sect's formal norms clashed too severely to be tolerated by U.S. law, and in 2008, authorities raided the compound and removed more than two hundred women and children from the property.

**Note:**

**The Evolution of American Hipster Subculture**

Skinny jeans, chunky glasses, and T-shirts with vintage logos—the American hipster is a recognizable figure in the modern United States. Based predominately in metropolitan areas, sometimes clustered around hotspots such as the Williamsburg neighborhood in New York City, hipsters define themselves through a rejection of the mainstream. As a subculture, hipsters spurn many of the values and beliefs of U.S. culture and prefer vintage clothing to fashion and a bohemian lifestyle to one of wealth and power. While hipster culture may seem to be the new trend among young, middle-class youth, the history of the group stretches back to the early decades of the 1900s.

Where did the hipster culture begin? In the early 1940s, jazz music was on the rise in the United States. Musicians were known as “hepcats” and had a smooth, relaxed quality that went against upright, mainstream life. Those who were “hep” or “hip” lived by the code of jazz, while those who were “square” lived according to society's rules. The idea of a “hipster” was born.

The hipster movement spread, and young people, drawn to the music and fashion, took on attitudes and language derived from the culture of jazz. Unlike the vernacular of the day, hipster slang was purposefully ambiguous. When hipsters said, “It's cool, man,” they meant not that everything was good, but that it was the way it was.



In the 1940s, U.S.  
hipsters were  
associated with the  
“cool” culture of jazz.  
(Photo courtesy of  
William P. Gottlieb/Ira  
and Leonore S.  
Gershwin Fund  
Collection, Music  
Division, Library of  
Congress)

By the 1950s, the jazz culture was winding down and many traits of hepcat culture were becoming mainstream. A new subculture was on the rise. The “Beat Generation,” a title coined by writer Jack Kerouac, were anticonformist and antimaterialistic. They were writers who listened to jazz and embraced radical politics. They bummed around, hitchhiked the country, and lived in squalor.

The lifestyle spread. College students, clutching copies of Kerouac’s *On the Road*, dressed in berets, black turtlenecks, and black-rimmed glasses. Women wore black leotards and grew their hair long. Herb Caen, a San Francisco journalist, used the suffix from *Sputnik 1*, the Russian satellite that orbited Earth in 1957, to dub the movement’s followers “Beatniks.” As the Beat Generation faded, a new, related movement began. It too focused on breaking social boundaries, but it also advocated freedom of

expression, philosophy, and love. It took its name from the generations before; in fact, some theorists claim that Beats themselves coined the term to describe their children. Over time, the “little hipsters” of the 1970s became known simply as “hippies.”

Today’s generation of hipsters rose out of the hippie movement in the same way that hippies rose from Beats and Beats from hepcats. Although contemporary hipsters may not seem to have much in common with 1940s hipsters, the emulation of nonconformity is still there. In 2010, sociologist Mark Greif set about investigating the hipster subculture of the United States and found that much of what tied the group members together was not based on fashion, musical taste, or even a specific point of contention with the mainstream. “All hipsters play at being the inventors or first adopters of novelties,” Greif wrote. “Pride comes from knowing, and deciding, what’s cool in advance of the rest of the world. Yet the habits of hatred and accusation are endemic to hipsters because they feel the weakness of everyone’s position—including their own” (Greif 2010). Much as the hepcats of the jazz era opposed common culture with carefully crafted appearances of coolness and relaxation, modern hipsters reject mainstream values with a purposeful apathy.

Young people are often drawn to oppose mainstream conventions, even if in the same way that others do. Ironic, cool to the point of noncaring, and intellectual, hipsters continue to embody a subculture, while simultaneously impacting mainstream culture.



Intellectual and



trendy, today's  
hipsters define  
themselves through  
cultural irony.  
(Photo courtesy of  
Lorena  
Cupcake/Wikimedi  
a Commons)

## Cultural Change

As the hipster example illustrates, culture is always evolving. Moreover, new things are added to material culture every day, and they affect nonmaterial culture as well. Cultures change when something new (say, railroads or smartphones) opens up new ways of living and when new ideas enter a culture (say, as a result of travel or globalization).

## Innovation: Discovery and Invention

An **innovation** refers to an object or concept's initial appearance in society—it's innovative because it is markedly new. There are two ways to come across an innovative object or idea: discover it or invent it. **Discoveries** make known previously unknown but existing aspects of reality. In 1610, when Galileo looked through his telescope and discovered Saturn, the planet was already there, but until then, no one had known about it. When Christopher Columbus encountered America, the land was, of course, already well known to its inhabitants. However, Columbus's discovery was new knowledge for Europeans, and it opened the way to changes in European culture, as well as to the cultures of the discovered lands. For example, new foods such as potatoes and tomatoes transformed the European diet, and horses brought from Europe changed hunting practices of Native American tribes of the Great Plains.

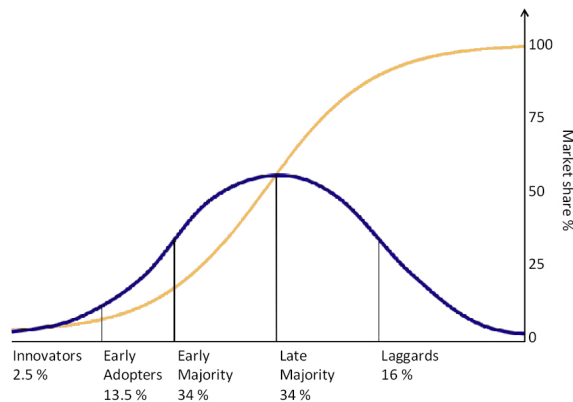
**Inventions** result when something new is formed from existing objects or concepts—when things are put together in an entirely new manner. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, electric appliances were invented at an astonishing pace. Cars, airplanes, vacuum cleaners, lamps, radios, telephones, and televisions were all new inventions. Inventions may shape a culture when people use them in place of older ways of carrying out activities and relating to others, or as a way to carry out new kinds of activities. Their adoption reflects (and may shape) cultural values, and their use may require new norms for new situations.

Consider the introduction of modern communication technology, such as mobile phones and smartphones. As more and more people began carrying these devices, phone conversations no longer were restricted to homes, offices, and phone booths. People on trains, in restaurants, and in other public places became annoyed by listening to one-sided conversations. Norms were needed for cell phone use. Some people pushed for the idea that those who are out in the world should pay attention to their companions and surroundings. However, technology enabled a workaround: texting, which enables quiet communication and has surpassed phoning as the chief way to meet today's highly valued ability to stay in touch anywhere, everywhere.

When the pace of innovation increases, it can lead to generation gaps. Technological gadgets that catch on quickly with one generation are sometimes dismissed by a skeptical older generation. A culture's objects and ideas can cause not just generational but cultural gaps. Material culture tends to diffuse more quickly than nonmaterial culture; technology can spread through society in a matter of months, but it can take generations for the ideas and beliefs of society to change. Sociologist William F. Ogburn coined the term **culture lag** to refer to this time that elapses between the introduction of a new item of material culture and its acceptance as part of nonmaterial culture (Ogburn 1957).

Culture lag can also cause tangible problems. The infrastructure of the United States, built a hundred years ago or more, is having trouble supporting today's more heavily populated and fast-paced life. Yet there is a lag in conceptualizing solutions to infrastructure problems. Rising fuel

prices, increased air pollution, and traffic jams are all symptoms of culture lag. Although people are becoming aware of the consequences of overusing resources, the means to support changes takes time to achieve.



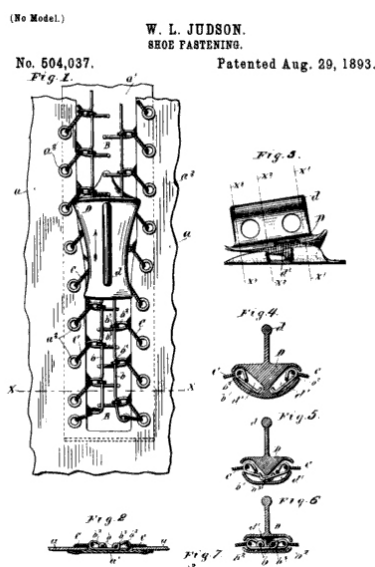
Sociologist Everett Rogers (1962) developed a model of the diffusion of innovations. As consumers gradually adopt a new innovation, the item grows toward a market share of 100 percent, or complete saturation within a society. (Graph courtesy of Tungsten/Wikimedia Commons)

## Diffusion and Globalization

The integration of world markets and technological advances of the last decades have allowed for greater exchange between cultures through the processes of globalization and diffusion. Beginning in the 1980s, Western governments began to deregulate social services while granting greater

liberties to private businesses. As a result, world markets became dominated by multinational companies in the 1980s, a new state of affairs at that time. We have since come to refer to this integration of international trade and finance markets as **globalization**. Increased communications and air travel have further opened doors for international business relations, facilitating the flow not only of goods but also of information and people as well (Scheuerman 2014 (revised)). Today, many U.S. companies set up offices in other nations where the costs of resources and labor are cheaper. When a person in the United States calls to get information about banking, insurance, or computer services, the person taking that call may be working in another country.

Alongside the process of globalization is **diffusion**, or the spread of material and nonmaterial culture. While globalization refers to the integration of markets, diffusion relates to a similar process in the integration of international cultures. Middle-class Americans can fly overseas and return with a new appreciation of Thai noodles or Italian gelato. Access to television and the Internet has brought the lifestyles and values portrayed in U.S. sitcoms into homes around the globe. Twitter feeds from public demonstrations in one nation have encouraged political protesters in other countries. When this kind of diffusion occurs, material objects and ideas from one culture are introduced into another.



Officially patented in 1893 as the “clasp locker” (left), the zipper did not diffuse through society for many decades. Today, it is immediately recognizable around the world. (Photo (a) courtesy of U.S. Patent Office/Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of Rabensteiner/Wikimedia Commons)

## Summary

Sociologists recognize high culture and popular culture within societies. Societies are also comprised of many subcultures—smaller groups that share an identity. Countercultures reject mainstream values and create their own cultural rules and norms. Through invention or discovery, cultures evolve via new ideas and new ways of thinking. In many modern cultures, the cornerstone of innovation is technology, the rapid growth of which can lead to cultural lag. Technology is also responsible for the spread of both material and nonmaterial culture that contributes to globalization.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

An example of high culture is \_\_\_\_\_, whereas an example of popular culture would be \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. Dostoevsky style in film; “American Idol” winners
  - b. medical marijuana; film noir
  - c. country music; pop music
  - d. political theory; sociological theory
-

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**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** The Ku Klux Klan is an example of what part of culture?

- a. Counterculture
- b. Subculture
- c. Multiculturalism
- d. Afrocentricity

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Modern-day hipsters are an example of:

- a. ethnocentricity
- b. counterculture
- c. subculture
- d. high culture

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Your eighty-three-year-old grandmother has been using a computer for some time now. As a way to keep in touch, you frequently send emails of a few lines to let her know about your day. She calls after every email to respond point by point, but she has never emailed a response back. This can be viewed as an example of:

- a. cultural lag
- b. innovation
- c. ethnocentricity
- d. xenophobia

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Some jobs today advertise in multinational markets and permit telecommuting in lieu of working from a primary location. This broadening of the job market and the way that jobs are performed can be attributed to:

- a. cultural lag
- b. innovation
- c. discovery
- d. globalization

---

**Solution:****Answer**

D

### **Exercise:**

**Problem:** The major difference between invention and discovery is:

- a. Invention is based on technology, whereas discovery is usually based on culture
- b. Discovery involves finding something that already exists, but invention puts things together in a new way
- c. Invention refers to material culture, whereas discovery can be material or theoretic, like laws of physics
- d. Invention is typically used to refer to international objects, whereas discovery refers to that which is local to one's culture

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**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

### **Exercise:**

**Problem:**

That McDonald's is found in almost every country around the world is an example of:

- a. globalization
- b. diffusion
- c. culture lag
- d. xenocentrism

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

### **Short Answer**



**Exercise:****Problem:**

Identify several examples of popular culture and describe how they inform larger culture. How prevalent is the effect of these examples in your everyday life?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Consider some of the specific issues or concerns of your generation. Are any ideas countercultural? What subcultures have emerged from your generation? How have the issues of your generation expressed themselves culturally? How has your generation made its mark on society's collective culture?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

What are some examples of cultural lag that are present in your life? Do you think technology affects culture positively or negatively? Explain.

**Further Research**

The Beats were a counterculture that birthed an entire movement of art, music, and literature—much of which is still highly regarded and studied today. The man responsible for naming the generation was Jack Kerouac; however, the man responsible for introducing the world to that generation was John Clellon Holmes, a writer often lumped in with the group. In 1952 he penned an article for the *New York Times Magazine* titled, “This Is the Beat Generation.” Read that article and learn more about Clellon Holmes and the Beats: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/The-Beats>

Popular culture meets counterculture in this as Oprah Winfrey interacts with members of the Yearning for Zion cult. Read about it here: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Oprah>

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(<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/globalization/>).

## Glossary

countercultures

groups that reject and oppose society's widely accepted cultural patterns

culture lag

the gap of time between the introduction of material culture and nonmaterial culture's acceptance of it

diffusion

the spread of material and nonmaterial culture from one culture to another

discoveries

things and ideas found from what already exists

globalization

the integration of international trade and finance markets

high culture

the cultural patterns of a society's elite

innovations

new objects or ideas introduced to culture for the first time

inventions

a combination of pieces of existing reality into new forms

popular culture

mainstream, widespread patterns among a society's population

subcultures

groups that share a specific identification, apart from a society's majority, even as the members exist within a larger society

## Theoretical Perspectives on Culture

- Discuss the major theoretical approaches to cultural interpretation

Music, fashion, technology, and values—all are products of culture. But what do they mean? How do sociologists perceive and interpret culture based on these material and nonmaterial items? Let's finish our analysis of culture by reviewing them in the context of three theoretical perspectives: functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

Functionalists view society as a system in which all parts work—or function—together to create society as a whole. In this way, societies need culture to exist. Cultural norms function to support the fluid operation of society, and cultural values guide people in making choices. Just as members of a society work together to fulfill a society's needs, culture exists to meet its members' basic needs.

Functionalists also study culture in terms of values. Education is an important concept in the United States because it is valued. The culture of education—including material culture such as classrooms, textbooks, libraries, dormitories—supports the emphasis placed on the value of educating a society's members.



This statue of Superman stands in the center of Metropolis, Illinois. His pedestal reads “Truth—Justice—The American Way.” How would a

functionalist interpret this  
statue? What does it reveal  
about the values of  
American culture? (Photo  
courtesy of David  
Wilson/flickr)

Conflict theorists view social structure as inherently unequal, based on power differentials related to issues like class, gender, race, and age. For a conflict theorist, culture is seen as reinforcing issues of "privilege" for certain groups based upon race, sex, class, and so on. Women strive for equality in a male-dominated society. Senior citizens struggle to protect their rights, their health care, and their independence from a younger generation of lawmakers. Advocacy groups such as the ACLU work to protect the rights of all races and ethnicities in the United States.

Inequalities exist within a culture's value system. Therefore, a society's cultural norms benefit some people but hurt others. Some norms, formal and informal, are practiced at the expense of others. Women were not allowed to vote in the United States until 1920. Gay and lesbian couples have been denied the right to marry in some states. Racism and bigotry are very much alive today. Although cultural diversity is supposedly valued in the United States, many people still frown upon interracial marriages. Same-sex marriages are banned in most states, and polygamy—common in some cultures—is unthinkable to most Americans.

At the core of conflict theory is the effect of economic production and materialism: dependence on technology in rich nations versus a lack of technology and education in poor nations. Conflict theorists believe that a society's system of material production has an effect on the rest of culture. People who have less power also have less ability to adapt to cultural change. This view contrasts with the perspective of functionalism. In the U.S. culture of capitalism, to illustrate, we continue to strive toward the promise of the American dream, which perpetuates the belief that the wealthy deserve their privileges.

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective that is most concerned with the face-to-face interactions between members of society.

Interactionists see culture as being created and maintained by the ways people interact and in how individuals interpret each other's actions.

Proponents of this theory conceptualize human interactions as a continuous process of deriving meaning from both objects in the environment and the actions of others. This is where the term symbolic comes into play. Every object and action has a symbolic meaning, and language serves as a means for people to represent and communicate their interpretations of these meanings to others. Those who believe in symbolic interactionism perceive culture as highly dynamic and fluid, as it is dependent on how meaning is interpreted and how individuals interact when conveying these meanings.

We began this chapter by asking what culture is. Culture is comprised of all the practices, beliefs, and behaviors of a society. Because culture is learned, it includes how people think and express themselves. While we may like to consider ourselves individuals, we must acknowledge the impact of culture; we inherit thought language that shapes our perceptions and patterned behavior, including about issues of family and friends, and faith and politics.

To an extent, culture is a social comfort. After all, sharing a similar culture with others is precisely what defines societies. Nations would not exist if people did not coexist culturally. There could be no societies if people did not share heritage and language, and civilization would cease to function if people did not agree on similar values and systems of social control.

Culture is preserved through transmission from one generation to the next, but it also evolves through processes of innovation, discovery, and cultural diffusion. We may be restricted by the confines of our own culture, but as humans we have the ability to question values and make conscious decisions. No better evidence of this freedom exists than the amount of cultural diversity within our own society and around the world. The more we study another culture, the better we become at understanding our own.



This child's clothing may be culturally specific, but her facial expression is universal. (Photo courtesy of Beth Rankin/flickr)

## Summary

There are three major theoretical approaches toward the interpretation of culture. A functionalist perspective acknowledges that there are many parts of culture that work together as a system to fulfill society's needs. Functionalists view culture as a reflection of society's values. Conflict theorists see culture as inherently unequal, based upon factors like gender, class, race, and age. An interactionist is primarily interested in culture as experienced in the daily interactions between individuals and the symbols that comprise a culture. Various cultural and sociological occurrences can be explained by these theories; however, there is no one "right" view through which to understand culture.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:**

A sociologist conducts research into the ways that Hispanic American students are historically underprivileged in the U.S. education system. What theoretical approach is the sociologist using?

- a. Symbolic interactionism
- b. Functionalism
- c. Conflict theory
- d. Ethnocentrism

---

**Solution:****Answer**

C

**Exercise:****Problem:**

The Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011 grew to be an international movement. Supporters believe that the economic disparity between the highest economic class and the mid to lower economic classes is growing at an exponentially alarming rate. A sociologist who studies that movement by examining the interactions between members at Occupy camps would most likely use what theoretical approach?

- a. Symbolic interactionism
- b. Functionalism
- c. Conflict theory
- d. Ethnocentrism

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A



**Exercise:****Problem:**

What theoretical perspective views society as having a system of interdependent inherently connected parts?

- a. Sociobiology
- b. Functionalism
- c. Conflict theory
- d. Ethnocentrism

---

**Solution:****Answer**

B

**Exercise:****Problem:**

The “American Dream”—the notion that anybody can be successful and rich if they work hard enough—is most commonly associated with which sociological theory?

- a. Sociobiology
- b. Functionalism
- c. Conflict theory
- d. Ethnocentrism

---

**Solution:****Answer**

C

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Consider a current social trend that you have witnessed, perhaps situated around family, education, transportation, or finances. For example, many veterans of the Armed Forces, after completing tours of duty in the Middle East, are returning to college rather than entering jobs as veterans as previous generations did. Choose a sociological approach—functionalism, conflict theory, or symbolic interactionism—to describe, explain, and analyze the social issue you choose. Afterward, determine why you chose the approach you did. Does it suit your own way of thinking? Or did it offer the best method to illuminate the social issue?

## Introduction to Groups and Organizations

class="introduction"

Over the past decade, a grassroots effort to raise awareness of certain political issues has gained in popularity. As a result, Tea Party groups have popped up in nearly every community across the country. The followers of the Tea Party have charged themselves with calling “awareness to any issue which challenges the security, sovereignty, or domestic tranquility of our beloved nation, the United States of America” (Tea Party, Inc. 2014). The group takes its name from the famous so-called Tea Party that occurred in Boston Harbor in 1773. Its membership includes people from all walks of life who are taking a stand to protect their values and beliefs. Their beliefs tend to be anti-tax, anti-big government, pro-gun, and generally politically conservative.

Their political stance is supported by what they refer to as their “15 Non-Negotiable Core Beliefs.”

1. Illegal aliens are here illegally.
2. Pro-domestic employment is indispensable.
3. A strong military is essential.
4. Special interests must be eliminated.
5. Gun ownership is sacred.
6. Government must be downsized.
7. The national budget must be balanced.
8. Deficit spending must end.
9. Bailout and stimulus plans are illegal.
10. Reducing personal income taxes is a must.
11. Reducing business income taxes is mandatory.
12. Political office must be available to average citizens.
13. Intrusive government must be stopped.
14. English as our core language is required.
15. Traditional family values are encouraged.

Tea Party politicians have been elected to several offices at the national, state, and local levels. In fact, Alabama, California, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Ohio, and Texas all had pro-Tea Party members win seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate. On the national stage, Tea

Partiers are actively seeking the impeachment of President Barack Obama for what they refer to “flagrant violations,” including forcing national healthcare (Obamacare) on the country, gun grabbing, and failing to protect victims of the terror attack on U.S. diplomatic offices in Benghazi, Libya, on September 11, 2012.

At the local level, Tea Party supporters have taken roles as mayors, county commissioners, city council members, and the like. In a small, rural, Midwestern county with a population of roughly 160,000, the three county commissioners who oversee the operation and administration of county government were two Republicans and a Democrat for years. During the 2012 election, the Democrat lost his seat to an outspoken Tea Party Republican who campaigned as pro-gun and fiscally conservative. He vowed to reduce government spending and shrink the size of county government.

The  
national  
tour of the  
Tea Party  
Express  
visited  
Minnesota  
and held a  
rally  
outside the  
state  
capitol  
building.  
(Photo  
courtesy of  
Fibonacci  
Blue/flickr  
)



Groups like political parties are prevalent in our lives and provide a significant way we understand and define ourselves—both groups we feel a connection to and those we don't. Groups also play an important role in society. As enduring social units, they help foster shared value systems and are key to the structure of society as we know it. There are three primary sociological perspectives for studying groups: Functionalist, Conflict, and Interactionist. We can look at the Tea Party movement through the lenses of these methods to better understand the roles and challenges that groups offer.

The Functionalist perspective is a big-picture, macro-level view that looks at how different aspects of society are intertwined. This perspective is based on the idea that society is a well-balanced system with all parts necessary to the whole, and it studies the roles these parts play in relation to the whole. In the case of the Tea Party Movement, a Functionalist might look at what macro-level needs the movement serves. For example, a Structural

Functionalist might ask how the party forces people to pay attention to the economy.

The Conflict perspective is another macroanalytical view, one that focuses on the genesis and growth of inequality. A conflict theorist studying the Tea Party Movement might look at how business interests have manipulated the system over the last 30 years, leading to the gross inequality we see today. Or this perspective might explore how the massive redistribution of wealth from the middle class to the upper class could lead to a two-class system reminiscent of Marxist ideas.

A third perspective is the Symbolic Interaction or Interactionist perspective. This method of analyzing groups takes a micro-level view. Instead of studying the big picture, these researchers look at the day-to-day interactions of groups. Studying these details, the Interactionist looks at issues like leadership style and group dynamics. In the case of the Tea Party Movement, Interactionists might ask, “How does the group dynamic in New York differ from that in Atlanta?” Or, “What dictates who becomes the *de facto* leader in different cities—geography, social dynamics, economic circumstances?”

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## Types of Groups

- Understand primary and secondary groups as the two sociological groups
- Recognize in-groups and out-groups as subtypes of primary and secondary groups
- Define reference groups

Most of us feel comfortable using the word “group” without giving it much thought. In everyday use, it can be a generic term, although it carries important clinical and scientific meanings. Moreover, the concept of a group is central to much of how we think about society and human interaction. Often, we might mean different things by using that word. We might say that a group of kids all saw the dog, and it could mean 250 students in a lecture hall or four siblings playing on a front lawn. In everyday conversation, there isn’t a clear distinguishing use. So how can we hone the meaning more precisely for sociological purposes?

## Defining a Group

The term **group** is an amorphous one and can refer to a wide variety of gatherings, from just two people (think about a “group project” in school when you partner with another student), a club, a regular gathering of friends, or people who work together or share a hobby. In short, the term refers to any collection of at least two people who interact with some frequency and who share a sense that their identity is somehow aligned with the group. Of course, every time people are gathered it is not necessarily a group. A rally is usually a one-time event, for instance, and belonging to a political party doesn’t imply interaction with others. People who exist in the same place at the same time but who do not interact or share a sense of identity—such as a bunch of people standing in line at Starbucks—are considered an **aggregate**, or a crowd. Another example of a nongroup is people who share similar characteristics but are not tied to one another in any way. These people are considered a **category**, and as an example all children born from approximately 1980–2000 are referred to as “Millennials.” Why are Millennials a category and not a group? Because

while some of them may share a sense of identity, they do not, as a whole, interact frequently with each other.

Interestingly, people within an aggregate or category can become a group. During disasters, people in a neighborhood (an aggregate) who did not know each other might become friendly and depend on each other at the local shelter. After the disaster ends and the people go back to simply living near each other, the feeling of cohesiveness may last since they have all shared an experience. They might remain a group, practicing emergency readiness, coordinating supplies for next time, or taking turns caring for neighbors who need extra help. Similarly, there may be many groups within a single category. Consider teachers, for example. Within this category, groups may exist like teachers' unions, teachers who coach, or staff members who are involved with the PTA.

## Types of Groups

Sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929) suggested that groups can broadly be divided into two categories: **primary groups** and **secondary groups** (Cooley 1909). According to Cooley, primary groups play the most critical role in our lives. The primary group is usually fairly small and is made up of individuals who generally engage face-to-face in long-term emotional ways. This group serves emotional needs: **expressive functions** rather than pragmatic ones. The primary group is usually made up of significant others, those individuals who have the most impact on our socialization. The best example of a primary group is the family.

Secondary groups are often larger and impersonal. They may also be task-focused and time-limited. These groups serve an **instrumental function** rather than an expressive one, meaning that their role is more goal- or task-oriented than emotional. A classroom or office can be an example of a secondary group. Neither primary nor secondary groups are bound by strict definitions or set limits. In fact, people can move from one group to another. A graduate seminar, for example, can start as a secondary group focused on the class at hand, but as the students work together throughout their program, they may find common interests and strong ties that transform them into a primary group.



**Note:****Best Friends She's Never Met**

Writer Allison Levy worked alone. While she liked the freedom and flexibility of working from home, she sometimes missed having a community of coworkers, both for the practical purpose of brainstorming and the more social “water cooler” aspect. Levy did what many do in the Internet age: she found a group of other writers online through a web forum. Over time, a group of approximately twenty writers, who all wrote for a similar audience, broke off from the larger forum and started a private invitation-only forum. While writers in general represent all genders, ages, and interests, it ended up being a collection of twenty- and thirty-something women who comprised the new forum; they all wrote fiction for children and young adults.

At first, the writers’ forum was clearly a secondary group united by the members’ professions and work situations. As Levy explained, “On the Internet, you can be present or absent as often as you want. No one is expecting you to show up.” It was a useful place to research information about different publishers and about who had recently sold what and to track industry trends. But as time passed, Levy found it served a different purpose. Since the group shared other characteristics beyond their writing (such as age and gender), the online conversation naturally turned to matters such as child-rearing, aging parents, health, and exercise. Levy found it was a sympathetic place to talk about any number of subjects, not just writing. Further, when people didn’t post for several days, others expressed concern, asking whether anyone had heard from the missing writers. It reached a point where most members would tell the group if they were traveling or needed to be offline for awhile.

The group continued to share. One member on the site who was going through a difficult family illness wrote, “I don’t know where I’d be without you women. It is so great to have a place to vent that I know isn’t hurting anyone.” Others shared similar sentiments.

So is this a primary group? Most of these people have never met each other. They live in Hawaii, Australia, Minnesota, and across the world. They may never meet. Levy wrote recently to the group, saying, “Most of my ‘real-life’ friends and even my husband don’t really get the writing thing. I don’t know what I’d do without you.” Despite the distance and the lack of physical contact, the group clearly fills an expressive need.



Engineering and construction students gather around a job site. How do your academic interests define your in- and out-groups? (Photo courtesy of USACEpublicaffairs/flickr)

## In-Groups and Out-Groups

One of the ways that groups can be powerful is through inclusion, and its inverse, exclusion. The feeling that we belong in an elite or select group is a heady one, while the feeling of not being allowed in, or of being in competition with a group, can be motivating in a different way. Sociologist William Sumner (1840–1910) developed the concepts of **in-group** and **out-group** to explain this phenomenon (Sumner 1906). In short, an in-group is the group that an individual feels she belongs to, and she believes it to be an integral part of who she is. An out-group, conversely, is a group someone doesn't belong to; often we may feel disdain or competition in relationship to an out-group. Sports teams, unions, and sororities are examples of in-groups and out-groups; people may belong to, or be an outsider to, any of these. Primary groups consist of both in-groups and out-groups, as do secondary groups.

While group affiliations can be neutral or even positive, such as the case of a team sport competition, the concept of in-groups and out-groups can also

explain some negative human behavior, such as white supremacist movements like the Ku Klux Klan, or the bullying of gay or lesbian students. By defining others as “not like us” and inferior, in-groups can end up practicing ethnocentrism, racism, sexism, ageism, and heterosexism—manners of judging others negatively based on their culture, race, sex, age, or sexuality. Often, in-groups can form within a secondary group. For instance, a workplace can have cliques of people, from senior executives who play golf together, to engineers who write code together, to young singles who socialize after hours. While these in-groups might show favoritism and affinity for other in-group members, the overall organization may be unable or unwilling to acknowledge it. Therefore, it pays to be wary of the politics of in-groups, since members may exclude others as a form of gaining status within the group.

**Note:**

**Bullying and Cyberbullying: How Technology Has Changed the Game**

Most of us know that the old rhyme “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is inaccurate. Words can hurt, and never is that more apparent than in instances of bullying. Bullying has always existed and has often reached extreme levels of cruelty in children and young adults. People at these stages of life are especially vulnerable to others’ opinions of them, and they’re deeply invested in their peer groups. Today, technology has ushered in a new era of this dynamic. Cyberbullying is the use of interactive media by one person to torment another, and it is on the rise. Cyberbullying can mean sending threatening texts, harassing someone in a public forum (such as Facebook), hacking someone’s account and pretending to be him or her, posting embarrassing images online, and so on. A study by the Cyberbullying Research Center found that 20 percent of middle school students admitted to “seriously thinking about committing suicide” as a result of online bullying (Hinduja and Patchin 2010). Whereas bullying face-to-face requires willingness to interact with your victim, cyberbullying allows bullies to harass others from the privacy of their homes without witnessing the damage firsthand. This form of bullying is particularly dangerous because it’s widely accessible and therefore easier to accomplish.

Cyberbullying, and bullying in general, made international headlines in 2010 when a fifteen-year-old girl, Phoebe Prince, in South Hadley, Massachusetts, committed suicide after being relentlessly bullied by girls at her school. In the aftermath of her death, the bullies were prosecuted in the legal system and the state passed anti-bullying legislation. This marked a significant change in how bullying, including cyberbullying, is viewed in the United States. Now there are numerous resources for schools, families, and communities to provide education and prevention on this issue. The White House hosted a Bullying Prevention summit in March 2011, and President and First Lady Obama have used Facebook and other social media sites to discuss the importance of the issue.

According to a report released in 2013 by the National Center for Educational Statistics, close to 1 in every 3 (27.8 percent) students report being bullied by their school peers. Seventeen percent of students reported being the victims of cyberbullying.

Will legislation change the behavior of would-be cyberbullies? That remains to be seen. But we can hope communities will work to protect victims before they feel they must resort to extreme measures.

## Reference Groups



Athletes are often viewed as a reference group for young people.

(Photo courtesy of Johnny Bivera/U.S.  
Navy/Wikimedia Commons)

A **reference group** is a group that people compare themselves to—it provides a standard of measurement. In U.S. society, peer groups are common reference groups. Kids and adults pay attention to what their peers wear, what music they like, what they do with their free time—and they compare themselves to what they see. Most people have more than one reference group, so a middle school boy might look not just at his classmates but also at his older brother's friends and see a different set of norms. And he might observe the antics of his favorite athletes for yet another set of behaviors.

Some other examples of reference groups can be one's cultural center, workplace, family gathering, and even parents. Often, reference groups convey competing messages. For instance, on television and in movies, young adults often have wonderful apartments and cars and lively social lives despite not holding a job. In music videos, young women might dance and sing in a sexually aggressive way that suggests experience beyond their years. At all ages, we use reference groups to help guide our behavior and show us social norms. So how important is it to surround yourself with positive reference groups? You may not recognize a reference group, but it still influences the way you act. Identifying your reference groups can help you understand the source of the social identities you aspire to or want to distance yourself from.

**Note:**

College: A World of In-Groups, Out-Groups, and Reference Groups



Which fraternity or sorority  
would you fit into, if any?  
Sorority recruitment day  
offers students an  
opportunity to learn about  
these different groups.  
(Photo courtesy of Murray  
State/flickr)

For a student entering college, the sociological study of groups takes on an immediate and practical meaning. After all, when we arrive someplace new, most of us glance around to see how well we fit in or stand out in the ways we want. This is a natural response to a reference group, and on a large campus, there can be many competing groups. Say you are a strong athlete who wants to play intramural sports, and your favorite musicians are a local punk band. You may find yourself engaged with two very different reference groups.

These reference groups can also become your in-groups or out-groups. For instance, different groups on campus might solicit you to join. Are there fraternities and sororities at your school? If so, chances are they will try to convince students—that is, students they deem worthy—to join them. And if you love playing soccer and want to play on a campus team, but you're wearing shredded jeans, combat boots, and a local band T-shirt, you might have a hard time convincing the soccer team to give you a chance. While most campus groups refrain from insulting competing groups, there is a definite sense of an in-group versus an out-group. "Them?" a member might say. "They're all right, but their parties are nowhere near as cool as

ours.” Or, “Only serious engineering geeks join that group.” This immediate categorization into in-groups and out-groups means that students must choose carefully, since whatever group they associate with won’t just define their friends—it may also define their enemies.

## Summary

Groups largely define how we think of ourselves. There are two main types of groups: primary and secondary. As the names suggest, the primary group is the long-term, complex one. People use groups as standards of comparison to define themselves—both who they are and who they are not. Sometimes groups can be used to exclude people or as a tool that strengthens prejudice.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

What does a Functionalist consider when studying a phenomenon like the Occupy Wall Street movement?

- a. The minute functions that every person at the protests plays in the whole
- b. The internal conflicts that play out within such a diverse and leaderless group
- c. How the movement contributes to the stability of society by offering the discontented a safe, controlled outlet for dissension
- d. The factions and divisions that form within the movement

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#### Solution:

#### Answer

C

**Exercise:****Problem:**

What is the largest difference between the Functionalist and Conflict perspectives and the Interactionist perspective?

- a. The former two consider long-term repercussions of the group or situation, while the latter focuses on the present.
- b. The first two are the more common sociological perspective, while the latter is a newer sociological model.
- c. The first two focus on hierarchical roles within an organization, while the last takes a more holistic view.
- d. The first two perspectives address large-scale issues facing groups, while the last examines more detailed aspects.

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**Solution:****Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** What role do secondary groups play in society?

- a. They are transactional, task-based, and short-term, filling practical needs.
- b. They provide a social network that allows people to compare themselves to others.
- c. The members give and receive emotional support.
- d. They allow individuals to challenge their beliefs and prejudices.

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A



**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

When a high school student gets teased by her basketball team for receiving an academic award, she is dealing with competing \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. primary groups
- b. out-groups
- c. reference groups
- d. secondary groups

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Which of the following is *not* an example of an in-group?

- a. The Ku Klux Klan
- b. A fraternity
- c. A synagogue
- d. A high school

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What is a group whose values, norms, and beliefs come to serve as a standard for one's own behavior?

- a. Secondary group
- b. Formal organization
- c. Reference group
- d. Primary group

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

A parent who is worrying over her teenager's dangerous and self-destructive behavior and low self-esteem may wish to look at her child's:

- a. reference group
- b. in-group
- c. out-group
- d. All of the above

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**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

How has technology changed your primary groups and secondary groups? Do you have more (and separate) primary groups due to online connectivity? Do you believe that someone, like Levy, can have a true primary group made up of people she has never met? Why, or why not?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Compare and contrast two different political groups or organizations, such as the Occupy and Tea Party movements, or one of the Arab Spring uprisings. How do the groups differ in terms of leadership, membership, and activities? How do the group's goals influence participants? Are any of them in-groups (and have they created out-groups)? Explain your answer.

**Exercise:****Problem:**

The concept of hate crimes has been linked to in-groups and out-groups. Can you think of an example where people have been excluded or tormented due to this kind of group dynamic?

**Further Research**

For more information about cyberbullying causes and statistics, check out this website: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cyberbullying>

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## Glossary

aggregate

a collection of people who exist in the same place at the same time, but who don't interact or share a sense of identity

category

people who share similar characteristics but who are not connected in any way

expressive function

a group function that serves an emotional need

group

any collection of at least two people who interact with some frequency and who share some sense of aligned identity

in-group

a group a person belongs to and feels is an integral part of his identity

instrumental function

being oriented toward a task or goal

out-group

a group that an individual is not a member of, and may even compete with

primary groups

small, informal groups of people who are closest to us

reference groups

groups to which an individual compares herself

secondary groups

larger and more impersonal groups that are task-focused and time limited

## Group Size and Structure

- How size influences group dynamics
- Different styles of leadership
- How conformity is impacted by groups



Cadets illustrate how strongly conformity can define groups.

(Photo courtesy David Spender/flickr)

## Dyads, Triads, and Large Groups

A small group is typically one where the collection of people is small enough that all members of the group know each other and share simultaneous interaction, such as a nuclear family, a dyad, or a triad. Georg Simmel (1858–1915) wrote extensively about the difference between a **dyad**, or two-member group, and a **triad**, which is a three-member group (Simmel 1902). In the former, if one person withdraws, the group can no longer exist. We can think of a divorce, which effectively ends the “group” of the married couple or of two best friends never speaking again. In a triad, however, the dynamic is quite different. If one person withdraws, the group lives on. A triad has a different set of relationships. If there are three in the group, two-against-one dynamics can develop, and there exists the potential for a majority opinion on any issue. Small groups generally have strong internal cohesiveness and a sense of connection. The challenge, however, is

for small groups to achieve large goals. They can struggle to be heard or to be a force for change if they are pushing against larger groups. In short, they are easier to ignore.

It is difficult to define exactly when a small group becomes a large group. Perhaps it occurs when there are too many people to join in a simultaneous discussion. Or perhaps a group joins with other groups as part of a movement that unites them. These larger groups may share a geographic space, such as a fraternity or sorority on the same campus, or they might be spread out around the globe. The larger the group, the more attention it can garner, and the more pressure members can put toward whatever goal they wish to achieve. At the same time, the larger the group becomes, the more the risk grows for division and lack of cohesion.

## Group Leadership

Often, larger groups require some kind of leadership. In small, primary groups, leadership tends to be informal. After all, most families don't take a vote on who will rule the group, nor do most groups of friends. This is not to say that *de facto* leaders don't emerge, but formal leadership is rare. In secondary groups, leadership is usually more overt. There are often clearly outlined roles and responsibilities, with a chain of command to follow. Some secondary groups, like the military, have highly structured and clearly understood chains of command, and many lives depend on those. After all, how well could soldiers function in a battle if they had no idea whom to listen to or if different people were calling out orders? Other secondary groups, like a workplace or a classroom, also have formal leaders, but the styles and functions of leadership can vary significantly.

**Leadership function** refers to the main focus or goal of the leader. An **instrumental leader** is one who is goal-oriented and largely concerned with accomplishing set tasks. We can imagine that an army general or a Fortune 500 CEO would be an instrumental leader. In contrast, **expressive leaders** are more concerned with promoting emotional strength and health, and ensuring that people feel supported. Social and religious leaders—rabbis, priests, imams, directors of youth homes and social service programs—are often perceived as expressive leaders. There is a

longstanding stereotype that men are more instrumental leaders, and women are more expressive leaders. And although gender roles have changed, even today many women and men who exhibit the opposite-gender manner can be seen as deviants and can encounter resistance. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's experiences provide an example of the way society reacts to a high-profile woman who is an instrumental leader. Despite the stereotype, Boatwright and Forrest (2000) have found that both men and women prefer leaders who use a combination of expressive and instrumental leadership.

In addition to these leadership functions, there are three different **leadership styles**. **Democratic leaders** encourage group participation in all decision making. They work hard to build consensus before choosing a course of action and moving forward. This type of leader is particularly common, for example, in a club where the members vote on which activities or projects to pursue. Democratic leaders can be well liked, but there is often a danger that they will proceed slowly since consensus building is time-consuming. A further risk is that group members might pick sides and entrench themselves into opposing factions rather than reaching a solution. In contrast, a **laissez-faire leader** (French for “leave it alone”) is hands-off, allowing group members to self-manage and make their own decisions. An example of this kind of leader might be an art teacher who opens the art cupboard, leaves materials on the shelves, and tells students to help themselves and make some art. While this style can work well with highly motivated and mature participants who have clear goals and guidelines, it risks group dissolution and a lack of progress. As the name suggests, **authoritarian leaders** issue orders and assigns tasks. These leaders are clear instrumental leaders with a strong focus on meeting goals. Often, entrepreneurs fall into this mold, like Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. Not surprisingly, the authoritarian leader risks alienating the workers. There are times, however, when this style of leadership can be required. In different circumstances, each of these leadership styles can be effective and successful. Consider what leadership style you prefer. Why? Do you like the same style in different areas of your life, such as a classroom, a workplace, and a sports team?

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**Note:**

**Women Leaders and the Hillary Clinton/Sarah Palin Phenomenon**



Presidential candidate  
Hillary Clinton drew fire for  
her leadership style. (Photo  
courtesy marc/flickr)

The 2008 presidential election marked a dynamic change when two female politicians entered the race. Of the 200 people who have run for president during the country's history, fewer than thirty have been women.

Democratic presidential candidate and former First Lady Hillary Clinton was both famously polarizing and popular. She had almost as many passionate supporters as she did people who reviled her.

On the other side of the aisle was Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin. The former governor of Alaska, Palin was, to some, the perfect example of the modern woman. She juggled her political career with raising a growing family and relied heavily on the use of social media to spread her message.

So what light did these candidates' campaigns shed on the possibilities of a female presidency? According to some political analysts, women candidates face a paradox: They must be as tough as their male opponents on issues such as foreign policy, or they risk appearing weak. However, the stereotypical expectation of women as expressive leaders is still prevalent. Consider that Hillary Clinton's popularity surged in her 2008 campaign after she cried on the campaign trail. It was enough for the *New York Times* to publish an editorial, "Can Hillary Cry Her Way Back to the White

House?” (Dowd 2008). Harsh, but her approval ratings soared afterward. In fact, many compared it to how politically likable she was in the aftermath of President Clinton’s Monica Lewinsky scandal. Sarah Palin’s expressive qualities were promoted to a greater degree. While she has benefited from the efforts of feminists before her, she self-identified as a traditional woman with traditional values, a point she illustrated by frequently bringing her young children up on stage with her. So what does this mean for women who would be president, and for those who would vote for them? On the positive side, a recent study of eighteen-to twenty-five-year-old women that asked whether female candidates in the 2008 election made them believe a woman would be president during their lifetime found that the majority thought they would (Weeks 2011). And the more that young women demand female candidates, the more commonplace female contenders will become. Women as presidential candidates may no longer be a novelty with the focus of their campaign, no matter how obliquely, on their gender. Some, however, remain skeptical. As one political analyst said bluntly, “Women don’t succeed in politics—or other professions—unless they act like men. The standard for running for national office remains distinctly male” (Weeks 2011).



This gag gift demonstrates how female leaders may be

viewed if they  
violate social  
norms. (Photo  
courtesy of  
istolethetv/flickr  
)

## Conformity

We all like to fit in to some degree. Likewise, when we want to stand out, we want to choose how we stand out and for what reasons. For example, a woman who loves cutting-edge fashion and wants to dress in thought-provoking new styles likely wants to be noticed, but most likely she will want to be noticed within a framework of high fashion. She wouldn't want people to think she was too poor to find proper clothes. **Conformity** is the extent to which an individual complies with group norms or expectations. As you might recall, we use reference groups to assess and understand how to act, to dress, and to behave. Not surprisingly, young people are particularly aware of who conforms and who does not. A high school boy whose mother makes him wear ironed button-down shirts might protest that he will look stupid—that everyone else wears T-shirts. Another high school boy might like wearing those shirts as a way of standing out. How much do you enjoy being noticed? Do you consciously prefer to conform to group norms so as not to be singled out? Are there people in your class who immediately come to mind when you think about those who don't want to conform?

Psychologist Solomon Asch (1907–1996) conducted experiments that illustrated how great the pressure to conform is, specifically within a small group (1956). After reading about his work in the Sociological Research feature, ask yourself what you would do in Asch's experiment. Would you speak up? What would help you speak up and what would discourage it?

**Note:****Conforming to Expectations**

In 1951, psychologist Solomon Asch sat a small group of about eight people around a table. Only one of the people sitting there was the true subject; the rest were associates of the experimenter. However, the subject was led to believe that the others were all, like him, people brought in for an experiment in visual judgments. The group was shown two cards, the first card with a single vertical line, and the second card with three vertical lines differing in length. The experimenter polled the group and asked each participant one at a time which line on the second card matched up with the line on the first card.

However, this was not really a test of visual judgment. Rather, it was Asch's study on the pressures of conformity. He was curious to see what the effect of multiple wrong answers would be on the subject, who presumably was able to tell which lines matched. In order to test this, Asch had each planted respondent answer in a specific way. The subject was seated in such a way that he had to hear almost everyone else's answers before it was his turn. Sometimes the nonsubject members would unanimously choose an answer that was clearly wrong.

So what was the conclusion? Asch found that thirty-seven out of fifty test subjects responded with an "obviously erroneous" answer at least once. When faced by a unanimous wrong answer from the rest of the group, the subject conformed to a mean of four of the staged answers. Asch revised the study and repeated it, wherein the subject still heard the staged wrong answers, but was allowed to write down his answer rather than speak it aloud. In this version, the number of examples of conformity—giving an incorrect answer so as not to contradict the group—fell by two thirds. He also found that group size had an impact on how much pressure the subject felt to conform.

The results showed that speaking up when only one other person gave an erroneous answer was far more common than when five or six people defended the incorrect position. Finally, Asch discovered that people were far more likely to give the correct answer in the face of near-unanimous consent if they had a single ally. If even one person in the group also dissented, the subject conformed only a quarter as often. Clearly, it was easier to be a minority of two than a minority of one.

Asch concluded that there are two main causes for conformity: people want to be liked by the group or they believe the group is better informed than they are. He found his study results disturbing. To him, they revealed that intelligent, well-educated people would, with very little coaxing, go along with an untruth. He believed this result highlighted real problems with the education system and values in our society (Asch 1956).

Stanley Milgram, a Yale psychologist, had similar results in his experiment that is now known simply as the Milgram Experiment. In 1962, Milgram found that research subjects were overwhelmingly willing to perform acts that directly conflicted with their consciences when directed by a person of authority. In the experiment, subjects were willing to administer painful, even supposedly deadly, shocks to others who answered questions incorrectly.

To learn more about similar research, visit <http://www.prisonexp.org/> and read an account of Philip Zimbardo's prison experiment conducted at Stanford University in 1971.

## Summary

The size and dynamic of a group greatly affects how members act. Primary groups rarely have formal leaders, although there can be informal leadership. Groups generally are considered large when there are too many members for a simultaneous discussion. In secondary groups there are two types of leadership functions, with expressive leaders focused on emotional health and wellness, and instrumental leaders more focused on results. Further, there are different leadership styles: democratic leaders, authoritarian leaders, and laissez-faire leaders.

Within a group, conformity is the extent to which people want to go along with the norm. A number of experiments have illustrated how strong the drive to conform can be. It is worth considering real-life examples of how conformity and obedience can lead people to ethically and morally suspect acts.

## Section Quiz

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Two people who have just had a baby have turned from a \_\_\_\_\_ to a \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. primary group; secondary group
- b. dyad; triad
- c. couple; family
- d. de facto group; nuclear family

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Who is more likely to be an expressive leader?

- a. The sales manager of a fast-growing cosmetics company
- b. A high school teacher at a reform school
- c. The director of a summer camp for chronically ill children
- d. A manager at a fast-food restaurant

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following is *not* an appropriate group for democratic leadership?

- a. A fire station
  - b. A college classroom
  - c. A high school prom committee
  - d. A homeless shelter
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

In Asch's study on conformity, what contributed to the ability of subjects to resist conforming?

- a. A very small group of witnesses
  - b. The presence of an ally
  - c. The ability to keep one's answer private
  - d. All of the above
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which type of group leadership has a communication pattern that flows from the top down?

- a. Authoritarian
- b. Democratic
- c. Laissez-faire
- d. Expressive

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

## **Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Think of a scenario where an authoritarian leadership style would be beneficial. Explain. What are the reasons it would work well? What are the risks?

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Describe a time you were led by a leader using, in your opinion, a leadership style that didn't suit the situation. When and where was it? What could she or he have done better?

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Imagine you are in Asch's study. Would you find it difficult to give the correct answer in that scenario? Why or why not? How would you change the study now to improve it?

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What kind of leader do you tend to be? Do you embrace different leadership styles and functions as the situation changes? Give an example of a time you were in a position of leadership and what function and style you expressed.



## Further Research

What is your leadership style? The website <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Leadership> offers a quiz to help you find out!

Explore other experiments on conformity at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Stanford-Prison>

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## **Glossary**

authoritarian leader

a leader who issues orders and assigns tasks

conformity

the extent to which an individual complies with group or societal norms

democratic leader

a leader who encourages group participation and consensus-building before moving into action

dyad

a two-member group

expressive leader

a leader who is concerned with process and with ensuring everyone's emotional wellbeing

instrumental leader

a leader who is goal oriented with a primary focus on accomplishing tasks

laissez-faire leader

a hands-off leader who allows members of the group to make their own decisions

leadership function

the main focus or goal of a leader

leadership style

the style a leader uses to achieve goals or elicit action from group members

triad

a three-member group

## Formal Organizations

- Understand the different types of formal organizations
- Recognize the characteristics of bureaucracies
- Identify the concepts of the McJob and the McDonaldization of society

A complaint of modern life is that society is dominated by large and impersonal secondary organizations. From schools to businesses to healthcare to government, these organizations, referred to as **formal organizations**, are highly bureaucratized. Indeed, all formal organizations are, or likely will become, **bureaucracies**. A bureaucracy is an ideal type of formal organization. Ideal doesn't mean "best" in its sociological usage; it refers to a general model that describes a collection of characteristics, or a type that could describe most examples of the item under discussion. For example, if your professor were to tell the class to picture a car in their minds, most students will picture a car that shares a set of characteristics: four wheels, a windshield, and so on. Everyone's car will be somewhat different, however. Some might picture a two-door sports car while others picture an SUV. The general idea of the car that everyone shares is the ideal type. We will discuss bureaucracies as an ideal type of organization.

## Types of Formal Organizations



Girl Scout troops and correctional facilities are both formal organizations. (Photo (a) courtesy of moonlightbulb/flickr;

Photo (b) courtesy of CxOxS/flickr)

Sociologist Amitai Etzioni (1975) posited that formal organizations fall into three categories. **Normative organizations**, also called **voluntary organizations**, are based on shared interests. As the name suggests, joining them is voluntary and typically done because people find membership rewarding in an intangible way. The Audubon Society and a ski club are examples of normative organizations. **Coercive organizations** are groups that we must be coerced, or pushed, to join. These may include prison or a rehabilitation center. Symbolic interactionist Erving Goffman states that most coercive organizations are **total institutions** (1961). A total institution is one in which inmates or military soldiers live a controlled lifestyle and in which total resocialization takes place. The third type is **utilitarian organizations**, which, as the name suggests, are joined because of the need for a specific material reward. High school and the workplace fall into this category—one joined in pursuit of a diploma, the other in order to make money.

	Normative or Voluntary	Coercive	Utilitarian
Benefit of Membership	Intangible benefit	Corrective benefit	Tangible benefit
Type of Membership	Volunteer basis	Required	Contractual basis
Feeling of Connectedness	Shared affinity	No affinity	Some affinity

Table of Formal OrganizationsThis table shows Etzioni’s three types of

Table 1. Formal Organizations and Their Characteristics. Table courtesy of Etzioni 1975)

## Bureaucracies

Bureaucracies are an ideal type of formal organization. Pioneer sociologist Max Weber popularly characterized a bureaucracy as having a hierarchy of authority, a clear division of labor, explicit rules, and impersonality (1922). People often complain about bureaucracies—declaring them slow, rule-bound, difficult to navigate, and unfriendly. Let's take a look at terms that define a bureaucracy to understand what they mean.

**Hierarchy of authority** refers to the aspect of bureaucracy that places one individual or office in charge of another, who in turn must answer to her own superiors. For example, as an employee at Walmart, your shift manager assigns you tasks. Your shift manager answers to his store manager, who must answer to her regional manager, and so on in a chain of command, up to the CEO who must answer to the board members, who in turn answer to the stockholders. Everyone in this bureaucracy follows the chain of command.

A **clear division of labor** refers to the fact that within a bureaucracy, each individual has a specialized task to perform. For example, psychology professors teach psychology, but they do not attempt to provide students with financial aid forms. In this case, it is a clear and commonsense division. But what about in a restaurant where food is backed up in the kitchen and a hostess is standing nearby texting on her phone? Her job is to seat customers, not to deliver food. Is this a smart division of labor?

The existence of **explicit rules** refers to the way in which rules are outlined, written down, and standardized. For example, at your college or university, the student guidelines are contained within the Student Handbook. As technology changes and campuses encounter new concerns like cyberbullying, identity theft, and other hot-button issues, organizations are scrambling to ensure their explicit rules cover these emerging topics.

Finally, bureaucracies are also characterized by **impersonality**, which takes personal feelings out of professional situations. This characteristic grew, to some extent, out of a desire to protect organizations from nepotism, backroom deals, and other types of favoritism, simultaneously protecting customers and others served by the organization. Impersonality is an attempt by large formal organizations to protect their members. Large business organizations like Walmart often situate themselves as bureaucracies. This allows them to effectively and efficiently serve volumes of customers quickly and with affordable products. This results in an impersonal organization. Customers frequently complain that stores like Walmart care little about individuals, other businesses, and the community at large.

Bureaucracies are, in theory at least, **meritocracies**, meaning that hiring and promotion is based on proven and documented skills, rather than on nepotism or random choice. In order to get into a prestigious college, you need to perform well on the SAT and have an impressive transcript. In order to become a lawyer and represent clients, you must graduate law school and pass the state bar exam. Of course, there are many well-documented examples of success by those who did not proceed through traditional meritocracies. Think about technology companies with founders who dropped out of college, or performers who became famous after a YouTube video went viral. How well do you think established meritocracies identify talent? Wealthy families hire tutors, interview coaches, test-prep services, and consultants to help their kids get into the best schools. This starts as early as kindergarten in New York City, where competition for the most highly-regarded schools is especially fierce. Are these schools, many of which have copious scholarship funds that are intended to make the school more democratic, really offering all applicants a fair shake?

There are several positive aspects of bureaucracies. They are intended to improve efficiency, ensure equal opportunities, and ensure that most people can be served. And there are times when rigid hierarchies are needed. But remember that many of our bureaucracies grew large at the same time that our school model was developed—during the Industrial Revolution. Young workers were trained, and organizations were built for mass production, assembly line work, and factory jobs. In these scenarios, a clear chain of

command was critical. Now, in the information age, this kind of rigid training and adherence to protocol can actually decrease both productivity and efficiency.

Today's workplace requires a faster pace, more problem solving, and a flexible approach to work. Too much adherence to explicit rules and a division of labor can leave an organization behind. And unfortunately, once established, bureaucracies can take on a life of their own. Maybe you have heard the expression "trying to turn a tanker around mid-ocean," which refers to the difficulties of changing direction with something large and set in its ways. State governments and current budget crises are examples of this challenge. It is almost impossible to make quick changes, leading states to continue, year after year, with increasingly unbalanced budgets. Finally, bureaucracies, as mentioned, grew as institutions at a time when privileged white males held all the power. While ostensibly based on meritocracy, bureaucracies can perpetuate the existing balance of power by only recognizing the merit in traditionally male and privileged paths.

Michels (1911) suggested that all large organizations are characterized by the **Iron Rule of Oligarchy**, wherein an entire organization is ruled by a few elites. Do you think this is true? Can a large organization be collaborative?



This McDonald's storefront in Egypt shows the McDonaldization of society. (Photo courtesy of s\_w\_ellis/flickr)



## The McDonaldization of Society

The **McDonaldization of Society** (Ritzer 1993) refers to the increasing presence of the fast food business model in common social institutions. This business model includes efficiency (the division of labor), predictability, calculability, and control (monitoring). For example, in your average chain grocery store, people at the register check out customers while stockers keep the shelves full of goods and deli workers slice meats and cheese to order (efficiency). Whenever you enter a store within that grocery chain, you receive the same type of goods, see the same store organization, and find the same brands at the same prices (predictability). You will find that goods are sold by the pound, so that you can weigh your fruit and vegetable purchase rather than simply guessing at the price for that bag of onions, while the employees use a timecard to calculate their hours and receive overtime pay (calculability). Finally, you will notice that all store employees are wearing a uniform (and usually a name tag) so that they can be easily identified. There are security cameras to monitor the store, and some parts of the store, such as the stockroom, are generally considered off-limits to customers (control). While McDonaldization has resulted in improved profits and an increased availability of various goods and services to more people worldwide, it has also reduced the variety of goods available in the marketplace while rendering available products uniform, generic, and bland. Think of the difference between a mass-produced shoe and one made by a local cobbler, between a chicken from a family-owned farm and a corporate grower, or between a cup of coffee from the local diner and one from Starbucks.

### **Note:**

#### **Secrets of the McJob**

We often talk about bureaucracies disparagingly, and no organization takes more heat than fast food restaurants. Several books and movies, such as *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* by Eric Schlosser, paint an ugly picture of what goes in, what goes on, and what

comes out of fast food chains. From their environmental impact to their role in the U.S. obesity epidemic, fast food chains are connected to numerous societal ills. Furthermore, working at a fast food restaurant is often disparaged, and even referred to dismissively, as having a McJob rather than a real job.

But business school professor Jerry Newman went undercover and worked behind the counter at seven fast food restaurants to discover what really goes on there. His book, *My Secret Life on the McJob*, documents his experience. Unlike Schossler, Newman found that these restaurants offer much good alongside the bad. Specifically, he asserted that the employees were honest and hardworking, that management was often impressive, and that the jobs required a lot more skill and effort than most people imagined. In the book, Newman cites a pharmaceutical executive who says a fast-food service job on an applicant's résumé is a plus because it indicates the employee is reliable and can handle pressure.

Businesses like Chipotle, Panera, and Costco attempt to combat many of the effects of McDonaldization. In fact, Costco is known for paying its employees an average of \$20 per hour, or slightly more than \$40,000.00 per year. Nearly 90% of their employees receive health insurance from Costco, a number that is unheard of in the retail sector.

While Chipotle is not known for high wages of its employees, it is known for attempting to sell high-quality foods from responsibly sourced providers. This is a different approach from what Schossler describes among burger chains like McDonalds.

So what do you think? Are these McJobs and the organizations that offer them still serving a role in the economy and people's careers? Or are they dead-end jobs that typify all that is negative about large bureaucracies? Have you ever worked in one? Would you?

### Jobs in Fast Food Will Enjoy Stronger than Average Growth in Coming Years



Fast-food jobs are expected to grow more quickly than most industries.  
(Graph courtesy of U.S. BLS)

## Summary

Large organizations fall into three main categories: normative/voluntary, coercive, and utilitarian. We live in a time of contradiction: while the pace of change and technology are requiring people to be more nimble and less bureaucratic in their thinking, large bureaucracies like hospitals, schools, and governments are more hampered than ever by their organizational format. At the same time, the past few decades have seen the development of a trend to bureaucratize and conventionalize local institutions.

Increasingly, Main Streets across the country resemble each other; instead of a Bob's Coffee Shop and Jane's Hair Salon there is a Dunkin Donuts and a Supercuts. This trend has been referred to as the McDonaldization of society.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Which is *not* an example of a normative organization?

- a. A book club
- b. A church youth group
- c. A People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) protest group
- d. A study hall

---

**Solution:**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Which of these is an example of a total institution?

- a. Jail
- b. High school
- c. Political party
- d. A gym

---

**Solution:**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Why do people join utilitarian organizations?

- a. Because they feel an affinity with others there
- b. Because they receive a tangible benefit from joining
- c. Because they have no choice
- d. Because they feel pressured to do so

---

**Solution:**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following is *not* a characteristic of bureaucracies?

- a. Coercion to join
- b. Hierarchy of authority
- c. Explicit rules
- d. Division of labor

---

**Solution:**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What are some of the intended positive aspects of bureaucracies?

- a. Increased productivity
- b. Increased efficiency
- c. Equal treatment for all
- d. All of the above

---

**Solution:**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** What is an advantage of the McDonaldization of society?

- a. There is more variety of goods.
  - b. There is less theft.
  - c. There is more worldwide availability of goods.
  - d. There is more opportunity for businesses.
- 

**Solution:**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** What is a disadvantage of the McDonaldization of society?

- a. There is less variety of goods.
  - b. There is an increased need for employees with postgraduate degrees.
  - c. There is less competition so prices are higher.
  - d. There are fewer jobs so unemployment increases.
- 

**Solution:**

A

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What do you think about the recent spotlight on fast food restaurants? Do you think they contribute to society's ills? Do you believe they provide a needed service? Have you ever worked a job like this? What did you learn?

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Do you consider today's large companies like General Motors, Amazon, or Facebook to be bureaucracies? Why, or why not? Which of the main characteristics of bureaucracies do you see in them? Which are absent?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Where do you prefer to shop, eat out, or grab a cup of coffee? Large chains like Walmart or smaller retailers? Starbucks or a local restaurant? What do you base your decisions on? Does this section change how you think about these choices? Why, or why not?

**Further Research**

As mentioned above, the concept of McDonaldization is a growing one. The following link discusses this phenomenon further:

<http://openstaxcollege.org/1/McDonaldization>

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## Glossary

bureaucracies

formal organizations characterized by a hierarchy of authority, a clear division of labor, explicit rules, and impersonality.

clear division of labor

the fact that each individual in a bureaucracy has a specialized task to perform

coercive organizations

organizations that people do not voluntarily join, such as prison or a mental hospital

explicit rules

the types of rules in a bureaucracy; rules that are outlined, recorded, and standardized

formal organizations

large, impersonal organizations

hierarchy of authority



a clear chain of command found in a bureaucracy

impersonality

the removal of personal feelings from a professional situation

Iron Rule of Oligarchy

the theory that an organization is ruled by a few elites rather than through collaboration

McDonaldization of Society

the increasing presence of the fast food business model in common social institutions

meritocracy

a bureaucracy where membership and advancement is based on merit—proven and documented skills

normative or voluntary organizations

organizations that people join to pursue shared interests or because they provide some intangible rewards

total institution

an organization in which participants live a controlled lifestyle and in which total resocialization occurs

utilitarian organizations

organizations that are joined to fill a specific material need

## Introduction to Society and Social Interaction

class="introduction"

Sociologists  
study how  
societies  
interact with  
the  
environment  
and how they  
use  
technology.  
(Photo  
courtesy of  
Garry  
Knight/flickr  
)



It was a school day, and Adriana, who was just entering eighth grade, woke up at 6:15 a.m. Before she got out of bed, she sent three text messages. One was to Jenn, who last year had moved five states away to a different time

zone. Even though they now lived far apart, the two friends texted on and off every day. Now Adriana wanted to tell Jenn that she liked the new boots in the photo that Jenn had posted on a social media site last night.

Throughout the day, Adriana used her smart phone to send fifty more texts, but she made no phone calls. She even texted her mother in the next room when she had a question about her homework. She kept in close electronic contact with all of her friends on a daily basis. In fact, when she wasn't doing homework or attending class, she was chatting and laughing with her friends via texts, tweets, and social media websites. Her smart phone was her main source of social interaction.

We can consider Adriana a typical teenager in the digital age—she constantly communicates with a large group of people who are not confined to one geographical area. This is definitely one of the benefits of new forms of communication: it is cheap and easy, and you can keep in touch with everyone at the same time. However, with these new forms of communication come new forms of societal interaction.

As we connect with each other more and more in an online environment, we make less time to interact in person. So the obvious question is this: are these forms of communication good developments in terms of social interaction? Or, if there are negative effects, what will they be? As we shall see, our reliance on electronic communication does have consequences. Beyond popularizing new forms of communication, it also alters the traditional ways in which we deal with conflict, the way we view ourselves in relationship to our surroundings, and the ways in which we understand social status.

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## Types of Societies

- Describe the difference between preindustrial, industrial, and postindustrial societies
- Understand the role of environment on preindustrial societies
- Understand how technology impacts societal development



How does technology influence a society's daily occupations? (Photo courtesy of Mo Riza/flickr)

Hunting and gathering tribes, industrialized Japan, Americans—each is a society. But what does this mean? Exactly what is a society? In sociological terms, **society** refers to a group of people who live in a definable community and share the same culture. On a broader scale, society consists of the people and institutions around us, our shared beliefs, and our cultural ideas. Typically, more-advanced societies also share a political authority.

Sociologist Gerhard Lenski Jr. (1924–2015) defined societies in terms of their technological sophistication. As a society advances, so does its use of technology. Societies with rudimentary technology depend on the fluctuations of their environments, while industrialized societies have more control over the impact of their surroundings and thus develop different cultural features. This distinction is so important that sociologists generally

classify societies along a spectrum of their level of industrialization—from preindustrial to industrial to postindustrial.

## **Preindustrial Societies**

Before the Industrial Revolution and the widespread use of machines, societies were small, rural, and dependent largely on local resources. Economic production was limited to the amount of labor a human being could provide, and there were few specialized occupations. The very first occupation was that of hunter-gatherer.

### **Hunter-Gatherer**

**Hunter-gatherer societies** demonstrate the strongest dependence on the environment of the various types of preindustrial societies. As the basic structure of human society until about 10,000–12,000 years ago, these groups were based around kinship or tribes. Hunter-gatherers relied on their surroundings for survival—they hunted wild animals and foraged for uncultivated plants for food. When resources became scarce, the group moved to a new area to find sustenance, meaning they were nomadic. These societies were common until several hundred years ago, but today only a few hundred remain in existence, such as indigenous Australian tribes sometimes referred to as “aborigines,” or the Bambuti, a group of pygmy hunter-gatherers residing in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Hunter-gatherer groups are quickly disappearing as the world’s population explodes.

### **Pastoral**

Changing conditions and adaptations led some societies to rely on the domestication of animals where circumstances permitted. Roughly 7,500 years ago, human societies began to recognize their ability to tame and breed animals and to grow and cultivate their own plants. **Pastoral societies**, such as the Maasai villagers, rely on the domestication of animals

as a resource for survival. Unlike earlier hunter-gatherers who depended entirely on existing resources to stay alive, pastoral groups were able to breed livestock for food, clothing, and transportation, and they created a surplus of goods. Herding, or pastoral, societies remained nomadic because they were forced to follow their animals to fresh feeding grounds. Around the time that pastoral societies emerged, specialized occupations began to develop, and societies commenced trading with local groups.

**Note:**

**Where Societies Meet—The Worst and the Best**

When cultures meet, technology can help, hinder, and even destroy. The Exxon Valdez oil spillage in Alaska nearly destroyed the local inhabitant's entire way of life. Oil spills in the Nigerian Delta have forced many of the Ogoni tribe from their land and forced removal has meant that over 100,000 Ogoni have sought refuge in the country of Benin (University of Michigan, n.d.). And the massive Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2006 drew great attention as it occurred in what is the most developed country, the United States. Environmental disasters continue as Western technology and its need for energy expands into less developed (peripheral) regions of the globe.

Of course not all technology is bad. We take electric light for granted in the United States, Europe, and the rest of the developed world. Such light extends the day and allows us to work, read, and travel at night. It makes us safer and more productive. But regions in India, Africa, and elsewhere are not so fortunate. Meeting the challenge, one particular organization, Barefoot College, located in District Ajmer, Rajasthan, India, works with numerous less developed nations to bring solar electricity, water solutions, and education. The focus for the solar projects is the village elders. The elders agree to select two grandmothers to be trained as solar engineers and choose a village committee composed of men and women to help operate the solar program.

The program has brought light to over 450,000 people in 1,015 villages. The environmental rewards include a large reduction in the use of kerosene and in carbon dioxide emissions. The fact that the villagers are operating the projects themselves helps minimize their sense of dependence.



Otherwise skeptic or hesitant villagers are more easily convinced of the value of the solar project when they realize that the “solar engineers” are their local grandmothers. (Photo courtesy of Abri le Roux/flickr)

## Horticultural

Around the same time that pastoral societies were on the rise, another type of society developed, based on the newly developed capacity for people to grow and cultivate plants. Previously, the depletion of a region’s crops or water supply forced pastoral societies to relocate in search of food sources for their livestock. **Horticultural societies** formed in areas where rainfall and other conditions allowed them to grow stable crops. They were similar to hunter-gatherers in that they largely depended on the environment for survival, but since they didn’t have to abandon their location to follow resources, they were able to start permanent settlements. This created more stability and more material goods and became the basis for the first revolution in human survival.

## Agricultural

While pastoral and horticultural societies used small, temporary tools such as digging sticks or hoes, **agricultural societies** relied on permanent tools for survival. Around 3000 B.C.E., an explosion of new technology known as the Agricultural Revolution made farming possible—and profitable. Farmers learned to rotate the types of crops grown on their fields and to reuse waste products such as fertilizer, which led to better harvests and bigger surpluses of food. New tools for digging and harvesting were made of metal, and this made them more effective and longer lasting. Human settlements grew into towns and cities, and particularly bountiful regions became centers of trade and commerce.

This is also the age in which people had the time and comfort to engage in more contemplative and thoughtful activities, such as music, poetry, and philosophy. This period became referred to as the “dawn of civilization” by some because of the development of leisure and humanities. Craftspeople were able to support themselves through the production of creative, decorative, or thought-provoking aesthetic objects and writings.

As resources became more plentiful, social classes became more divisive. Those who had more resources could afford better living and developed into a class of nobility. Difference in social standing between men and women increased. As cities expanded, ownership and preservation of resources became a pressing concern.

## Feudal

The ninth century gave rise to **feudal societies**. These societies contained a strict hierarchical system of power based around land ownership and protection. The nobility, known as lords, placed vassals in charge of pieces of land. In return for the resources that the land provided, vassals promised to fight for their lords.

These individual pieces of land, known as fiefdoms, were cultivated by the lower class. In return for maintaining the land, peasants were guaranteed a



place to live and protection from outside enemies. Power was handed down through family lines, with peasant families serving lords for generations and generations. Ultimately, the social and economic system of feudalism failed and was replaced by capitalism and the technological advances of the industrial era.

## **Industrial Society**

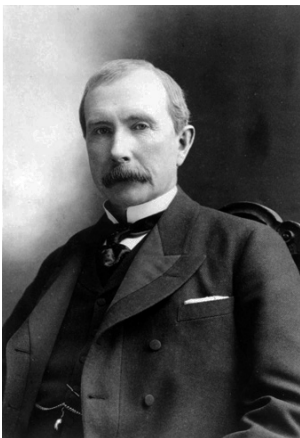
In the eighteenth century, Europe experienced a dramatic rise in technological invention, ushering in an era known as the Industrial Revolution. What made this period remarkable was the number of new inventions that influenced people's daily lives. Within a generation, tasks that had until this point required months of labor became achievable in a matter of days. Before the Industrial Revolution, work was largely person- or animal-based, and relied on human workers or horses to power mills and drive pumps. In 1782, James Watt and Matthew Boulton created a steam engine that could do the work of twelve horses by itself.

Steam power began appearing everywhere. Instead of paying artisans to painstakingly spin wool and weave it into cloth, people turned to textile mills that produced fabric quickly at a better price and often with better quality. Rather than planting and harvesting fields by hand, farmers were able to purchase mechanical seeders and threshing machines that caused agricultural productivity to soar. Products such as paper and glass became available to the average person, and the quality and accessibility of education and health care soared. Gas lights allowed increased visibility in the dark, and towns and cities developed a nightlife.

One of the results of increased productivity and technology was the rise of urban centers. Workers flocked to factories for jobs, and the populations of cities became increasingly diverse. The new generation became less preoccupied with maintaining family land and traditions and more focused on acquiring wealth and achieving upward mobility for themselves and their families. People wanted their children and their children's children to continue to rise to the top, and as capitalism increased, so did social mobility.

It was during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of the Industrial Revolution that sociology was born. Life was changing quickly and the long-established traditions of the agricultural eras did not apply to life in the larger cities. Masses of people were moving to new environments and often found themselves faced with horrendous conditions of filth, overcrowding, and poverty. Social scientists emerged to study the relationship between the individual members of society and society as a whole.

It was during this time that power moved from the hands of the aristocracy and “old money” to business-savvy newcomers who amassed fortunes in their lifetimes. Families such as the Rockefellers and the Vanderbilts became the new power players and used their influence in business to control aspects of government as well. Eventually, concerns over the exploitation of workers led to the formation of labor unions and laws that set mandatory conditions for employees. Although the introduction of new technology at the end of the nineteenth century ended the industrial age, much of our social structure and social ideas—like family, childhood, and time standardization—have a basis in industrial society.



John D.  
Rockefeller,  
cofounder of  
the Standard  
Oil  
Company,

came from an  
unremarkable  
family of  
salesmen and  
menial  
laborers. By  
his death at  
age 98, he  
was worth  
\$1.4 billion.  
In industrial  
societies,  
business  
owners such  
as  
Rockefeller  
hold the  
majority of  
the power.  
(Photo  
courtesy of  
Wikimedia  
Commons)

## Postindustrial Society

**Information societies**, sometimes known as postindustrial or digital societies, are a recent development. Unlike **industrial societies** that are rooted in the production of material goods, information societies are based on the production of information and services.

Digital technology is the steam engine of information societies, and computer moguls such as Steve Jobs and Bill Gates are its John D. Rockefellers and Cornelius Vanderbilts. Since the economy of information societies is driven by knowledge and not material goods, power lies with

those in charge of storing and distributing information. Members of a postindustrial society are likely to be employed as sellers of services—software programmers or business consultants, for example—instead of producers of goods. Social classes are divided by access to education, since without technical skills, people in an information society lack the means for success.

## Summary

Societies are classified according to their development and use of technology. For most of human history, people lived in preindustrial societies characterized by limited technology and low production of goods. After the Industrial Revolution, many societies based their economies around mechanized labor, leading to greater profits and a trend toward greater social mobility. At the turn of the new millennium, a new type of society emerged. This postindustrial, or information, society is built on digital technology and nonmaterial goods.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Which of the following fictional societies is an example of a pastoral society?

- a. The Deswan people, who live in small tribes and base their economy on the production and trade of textiles
- b. The Rositian Clan, a small community of farmers who have lived on their family's land for centuries
- c. The Hunti, a wandering group of nomads who specialize in breeding and training horses
- d. The Amaganda, an extended family of warriors who serve a single noble family

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following occupations is a person of power most likely to have in an information society?

- a. Software engineer
- b. Coal miner
- c. Children's book author
- d. Sharecropper

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following societies were the first to have permanent residents?

- a. Industrial
- b. Hunter-gatherer
- c. Horticultural
- d. Feudal

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

## Short Answer

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

In which type or types of societies do the benefits seem to outweigh the costs? Explain your answer, and cite social and economic reasons.

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Is Gerhard Lenski right in classifying societies based on technological advances? What other criteria might be appropriate, based on what you have read?

## Further Research

The Maasai are a modern pastoral society with an economy largely structured around herds of cattle. Read more about the Maasai people and see pictures of their daily lives here: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/The-Maasai>

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## **Glossary**

agricultural societies

societies that rely on farming as a way of life

feudal societies

societies that operate on a strict hierarchical system of power based around land ownership and protection

horticultural societies

societies based around the cultivation of plants

hunter-gatherer societies

societies that depend on hunting wild animals and gathering uncultivated plants for survival

industrial societies

societies characterized by a reliance on mechanized labor to create material goods

information societies

societies based on the production of nonmaterial goods and services

pastoral societies

societies based around the domestication of animals

society

a group of people who live in a definable community and share the same culture

## Theoretical Perspectives on Society

- Describe Durkhiem's functionalist view of society
- Understand the conflict theorist view of society
- Explain Marx's concepts of class and alienation
- Identify how symbolic interactionists understand society



Warren Buffett's ideas about taxation and spending habits of the very wealthy are controversial, particularly since they raise questions about America's embedded system of class structure and social power. The three major sociological paradigms differ



in their  
perspectives on  
these issues.  
(Photo courtesy  
of Medill  
DC/flickr)

While many sociologists have contributed to research on society and social interaction, three thinkers form the base of modern-day perspectives. Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber developed different theoretical approaches to help us understand the way societies function.

## Émile Durkheim and Functionalism

As a functionalist, Émile Durkheim's (1858–1917) perspective on society stressed the necessary interconnectivity of all of its elements. To Durkheim, society was greater than the sum of its parts. He asserted that individual behavior was not the same as collective behavior and that studying collective behavior was quite different from studying an individual's actions. Durkheim called the communal beliefs, morals, and attitudes of a society the **collective conscience**. In his quest to understand what causes individuals to act in similar and predictable ways, he wrote, "If I do not submit to the conventions of society, if in my dress I do not conform to the customs observed in my country and in my class, the ridicule I provoke, the social isolation in which I am kept, produce, although in an attenuated form, the same effects as punishment" (Durkheim 1895). Durkheim also believed that **social integration**, or the strength of ties that people have to their social groups, was a key factor in social life.

Following the ideas of Comte and Spencer, Durkheim likened society to a living organism, in which each organ plays a necessary role in keeping the being alive. Even the socially deviant members of society are necessary, Durkheim argued, as punishments for deviance affirm established cultural values and norms. That is, punishment of a crime reaffirms our moral consciousness. "A crime is a crime because we condemn it," Durkheim

wrote in 1893. “An act offends the common consciousness not because it is criminal, but it is criminal because it offends that consciousness” (Durkheim 1893). Durkheim called these elements of society “social facts.” By this, he meant that social forces were to be considered real and existed outside the individual.

As an observer of his social world, Durkheim was not entirely satisfied with the direction of society in his day. His primary concern was that the cultural glue that held society together was failing, and people were becoming more divided. In his book *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), Durkheim argued that as society grew more complex, social order made the transition from mechanical to organic.

Preindustrial societies, Durkheim explained, were held together by **mechanical solidarity**, a type of social order maintained by the collective consciousness of a culture. Societies with mechanical solidarity act in a mechanical fashion; things are done mostly because they have always been done that way. This type of thinking was common in preindustrial societies where strong bonds of kinship and a low division of labor created shared morals and values among people, such as hunter-gatherer groups. When people tend to do the same type of work, Durkheim argued, they tend to think and act alike.

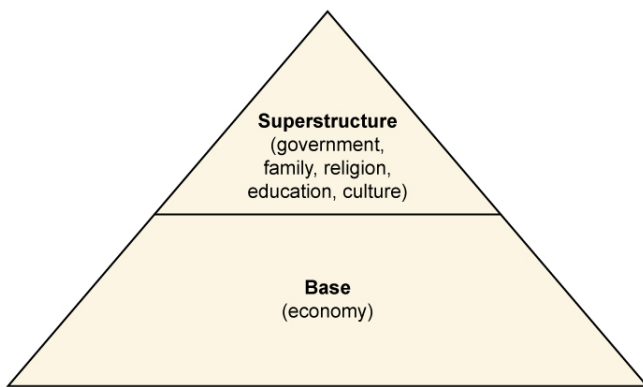
In industrial societies, mechanical solidarity is replaced with **organic solidarity**, which is social order based around an acceptance of economic and social differences. In capitalist societies, Durkheim wrote, division of labor becomes so specialized that everyone is doing different things. Instead of punishing members of a society for failure to assimilate to common values, organic solidarity allows people with differing values to coexist. Laws exist as formalized morals and are based on restitution rather than revenge.

While the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity is, in the long run, advantageous for a society, Durkheim noted that it can be a time of chaos and “normlessness.” One of the outcomes of the transition is something he called social **anomie**. Anomie—literally, “without law”—is a situation in which society no longer has the support of a firm collective consciousness. Collective norms are weakened. People, while more

interdependent to accomplish complex tasks, are also alienated from each other. Anomie is experienced in times of social uncertainty, such as war or a great upturn or downturn in the economy. As societies reach an advanced stage of organic solidarity, they avoid anomie by redeveloping a set of shared norms. According to Durkheim, once a society achieves organic solidarity, it has finished its development.

## Karl Marx and Conflict Theory

Karl Marx (1818–1883) is certainly among the most significant social thinkers in recent history. While there are many critics of his work, it is still widely respected and influential. For Marx, society's constructions were predicated upon the idea of “base and superstructure.” This term refers to the idea that a society's economic character forms its base, upon which rests the culture and social institutions, the superstructure. For Marx, it is the base (economy) that determines what a society will be like.



Karl Marx asserted that all elements of a society's structure depend on its economic structure.

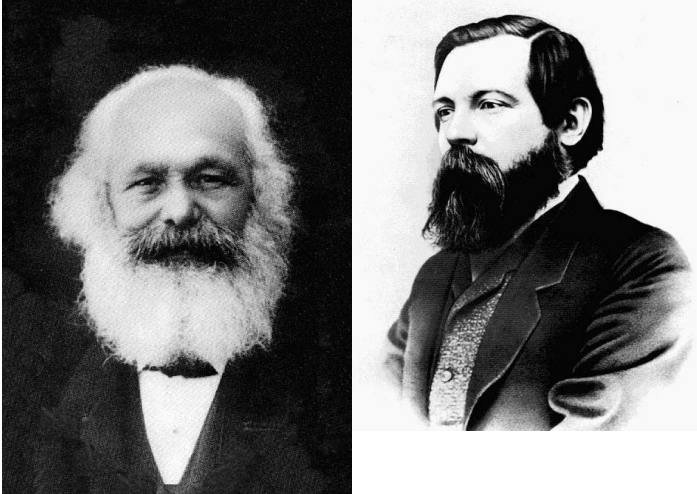
Additionally, Marx saw conflict in society as the primary means of change. Economically, he saw conflict existing between the owners of the means of production—the **bourgeoisie**—and the laborers, called the **proletariat**.

Marx maintained that these conflicts appeared consistently throughout history during times of social revolution. These revolutions or “class antagonisms” as he called them, were a result of one class dominating another. Most recently, with the end of feudalism, a new revolutionary class he called the bourgeoisie dominated the proletariat laborers. The bourgeoisie were revolutionary in the sense that they represented a radical change in the structure of society. In Marx’s words, “Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other—Bourgeoisie and Proletariat” (Marx and Engels 1848).

In the mid-nineteenth century, as industrialization was booming, industrial employers, the "owners of the means of production" in Marx's terms, became more and more exploitative toward the working class. The large manufacturers of steel were particularly ruthless, and their facilities became popularly dubbed “satanic mills” based on a poem by William Blake. Marx’s colleague and friend, Frederick Engels, wrote *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* in 1844, which described in detail the horrid conditions.

"Such is the Old Town of Manchester, and on re-reading my description, I am forced to admit that instead of being exaggerated, it is far from black enough to convey a true impression of the filth, ruin, and uninhabitableness, the defiance of all considerations of cleanliness, ventilation, and health which characterise the construction of this single district, containing at least twenty to thirty thousand inhabitants. And such a district exists in the heart of the second city of England, the first manufacturing city of the world."

Add to that the long hours, the use of child labor, and exposure to extreme conditions of heat, cold, and toxic chemicals, and it is no wonder that Marx and Engels referred to **capitalism**, which is a way of organizing an economy so that the things that are used to make and transport products (such as land, oil, factories, ships, etc.) are owned by individual people and companies rather than by the government, as the “dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.”



Karl Marx (left) and Friedrich Engels (right) analyzed differences in social power between “have” and “have-not” groups. (Photo (a) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of George Lester/Wikimedia Commons)

For Marx, what we do defines who we are. In historical terms, in spite of the persistent nature of one class dominating another, some element of humanity existed. There was at least some connection between the worker and the product, augmented by the natural conditions of seasons and the rise and fall of the sun, such as we see in an agricultural society. But with the bourgeoisie revolution and the rise of industry and capitalism, the worker now worked for wages alone. His relationship to his efforts was no longer of a human nature, but based on artificial conditions.

Marx described modern society in terms of alienation. **Alienation** refers to the condition in which the individual is isolated and divorced from his or her society, work, or the sense of self. Marx defined four specific types of alienation.

*Alienation from the product of one's labor.* An industrial worker does not have the opportunity to relate to the product he labors on. Instead of training for years as a watchmaker, an unskilled worker can get a job at a watch factory pressing buttons to seal pieces together. The worker does not care if he is making watches or cars, simply that the job exists. In the same way, a worker may not even know or care what product to which he is contributing. A worker on a Ford assembly line may spend all day installing windows on car doors without ever seeing the rest of the car. A cannery worker can spend a lifetime cleaning fish without ever knowing what product they are used for.

*Alienation from the process of one's labor.* A worker does not control the conditions of her job because she does not own the means of production. If a person is hired to work in a fast food restaurant, she is expected to make the food the way she is taught. All ingredients must be combined in a particular order and in a particular quantity; there is no room for creativity or change. An employee at Burger King cannot decide to change the spices used on the fries in the same way that an employee on a Ford assembly line cannot decide to place a car's headlights in a different position. Everything is decided by the bourgeoisie who then dictate orders to the laborers.

*Alienation from others.* Workers compete, rather than cooperate. Employees vie for time slots, bonuses, and job security. Even when a worker clocks out at night and goes home, the competition does not end. As Marx commented in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), "No sooner is the exploitation of the laborer by the manufacturer, so far at an end, that he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portion of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker."

*Alienation from one's self.* A final outcome of industrialization is a loss of connectivity between a worker and her occupation. Because there is nothing that ties a worker to her labor, there is no longer a sense of self. Instead of being able to take pride in an identity such as being a watchmaker, automobile builder, or chef, a person is simply a cog in the machine.

Taken as a whole, then, alienation in modern society means that an individual has no control over his life. Even in feudal societies, a person controlled the manner of his labor as to when and how it was carried out.

But why, then, does the modern working class not rise up and rebel? (Indeed, Marx predicted that this would be the ultimate outcome and collapse of capitalism.)

Another idea that Marx developed is the concept of **false consciousness**. False consciousness is a condition in which the beliefs, ideals, or ideology of a person are not in the person's own best interest. In fact, it is the ideology of the dominant class (here, the bourgeoisie capitalists) that is imposed upon the proletariat. Ideas such as the emphasis of competition over cooperation, or of hard work being its own reward, clearly benefit the owners of industry. Therefore, workers are less likely to question their place in society and assume individual responsibility for existing conditions.

In order for society to overcome false consciousness, Marx proposed that it be replaced with **class consciousness**, the awareness of one's rank in society. Instead of existing as a "class in itself," the proletariat must become a "class for itself" in order to produce social change (Marx and Engels 1848), meaning that instead of just being an inert strata of society, the class could become an advocate for social improvements. Only once society entered this state of political consciousness would it be ready for a social revolution.



An assembly line worker  
installs car parts with the aid  
of complex machinery. Has  
technology made this type of  
labor more or less

alienating? (Photo courtesy  
of Carol  
Highsmith/Wikimedia  
Commons)

## Max Weber and Symbolic Interactionism

While Karl Marx may be one of the best-known thinkers of the nineteenth century, Max Weber is certainly one of the greatest influences in the field of sociology. Like the other social thinkers discussed here, he was concerned with the important changes taking place in Western society with the advent of industrialization. And, like Marx and Durkheim, he feared that industrialization would have negative effects on individuals.

Weber's primary focus on the structure of society lay in the elements of class, status, and power. Similar to Marx, Weber saw class as economically determined. Society, he believed, was split between owners and laborers. Status, on the other hand, was based on noneconomic factors such as education, kinship, and religion. Both status and class determined an individual's power, or influence over ideas. Unlike Marx, Weber believed that these ideas formed the base of society.

Weber's analysis of modern society centered on the concept of **rationalization**. A rational society is one built around logic and efficiency rather than morality or tradition. To Weber, capitalism is entirely rational. Although this leads to efficiency and merit-based success, it can have negative effects when taken to the extreme. In some modern societies, this is seen when rigid routines and strict design lead to a mechanized work environment and a focus on producing identical products in every location.

Another example of the extreme conditions of rationality can be found in Charlie Chaplin's classic film *Modern Times* (1936). Chaplin's character performs a routine task to the point where he cannot stop his motions even while away from the job. Indeed, today we even have a recognized medical



condition that results from such tasks, known as “repetitive stress syndrome.”

Weber was also unlike his predecessors in that he was more interested in how individuals experienced societal divisions than in the divisions themselves. The symbolic interactionism theory, the third of the three most recognized theories of sociology, is based on Weber’s early ideas that emphasize the viewpoint of the individual and how that individual relates to society. For Weber, the culmination of industrialization, rationalization, and the like results in what he referred to as the **iron cage**, in which the individual is trapped by institutions and bureaucracy. This leads to a sense of “disenchantment of the world,” a phrase Weber used to describe the final condition of humanity. Indeed a dark prediction, but one that has, at least to some degree, been borne out (Gerth and Mills 1918). In a rationalized, modern society, we have supermarkets instead of family-owned stores. We have chain restaurants instead of local eateries. Superstores that offer a multitude of merchandise have replaced independent businesses that focused on one product line, such as hardware, groceries, automotive repair, or clothing. Shopping malls offer retail stores, restaurants, fitness centers, even condominiums. This change may be rational, but is it universally desirable?



Cubicles are used to maximize individual workspace in an office. Such

structures may be rational,  
but they are also isolating.

(Photo courtesy of Tim  
Patterson/flickr)

**Note:**

**The Protestant Work Ethic**

In a series of essays in 1904, Max Weber presented the idea of the *Protestant work ethic*, a new attitude toward work based on the Calvinist principle of predestination. In the sixteenth century, Europe was shaken by the Protestant Revolution. Religious leaders such as Martin Luther and John Calvin argued against the Catholic Church's belief in salvation through obedience. While Catholic leaders emphasized the importance of religious dogma and performing good deeds as a gateway to Heaven, Protestants believed that inner grace, or faith in God, was enough to achieve salvation.

John Calvin in particular popularized the Christian concept of predestination, the idea that all events—including salvation—have already been decided by God. Because followers were never sure whether they had been chosen to enter Heaven or Hell, they looked for signs in their everyday lives. If a person was hard-working and successful, he was likely to be one of the chosen. If a person was lazy or simply indifferent, he was likely to be one of the damned.

Weber argued that this mentality encouraged people to work hard for personal gain; after all, why should one help the unfortunate if they were already damned? Over time, the Protestant work ethic spread and became the foundation for capitalism.

**Summary**

Émile Durkheim believed that as societies advance, they make the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity. For Karl Marx, society exists in terms of class conflict. With the rise of capitalism, workers become alienated from themselves and others in society. Sociologist Max Weber noted that the rationalization of society can be taken to unhealthy extremes.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Organic solidarity is most likely to exist in which of the following types of societies?

- a. Hunter-gatherer
- b. Industrial
- c. Agricultural
- d. Feudal

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

B

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

According to Marx, the \_\_\_\_\_ own the means of production in a society.

- a. proletariat
- b. vassals
- c. bourgeoisie
- d. anomie

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following best depicts Marx's concept of alienation from the process of one's labor?

- a. A supermarket cashier always scans store coupons before company coupons because she was taught to do it that way.
- b. A businessman feels that he deserves a raise, but is nervous to ask his manager for one; instead, he comforts himself with the idea that hard work is its own reward.
- c. An associate professor is afraid that she won't be given tenure and starts spreading rumors about one of her associates to make herself look better.
- d. A construction worker is laid off and takes a job at a fast food restaurant temporarily, although he has never had an interest in preparing food before.

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

The Protestant work ethic is based on the concept of predestination, which states that \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. performing good deeds in life is the only way to secure a spot in Heaven
- b. salvation is only achievable through obedience to God

- c. no person can be saved before he or she accepts Jesus Christ as his or her savior
  - d. God has already chosen those who will be saved and those who will be damned
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

The concept of the iron cage was popularized by which of the following sociological thinkers?

- a. Max Weber
  - b. Karl Marx
  - c. Émile Durkheim
  - d. Friedrich Engels
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Émile Durkheim's ideas about society can best be described as \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. functionalist
- b. conflict theorist
- c. symbolic interactionist
- d. rationalist

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

## Short Answer

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Choose two of the three sociologists discussed here (Durkheim, Marx, Weber), and use their arguments to explain a current social event such as the Occupy movement. Do their theories hold up under modern scrutiny?

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Think of the ways workers are alienated from the product and process of their jobs. How can these concepts be applied to students and their educations?

## Further Research

One of the most influential pieces of writing in modern history was Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *The Communist Manifesto*. Visit this site to read the original document that spurred revolutions around the world:  
<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Communist-Party>.

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## **Glossary**

### **alienation**

an individual's isolation from his society, his work, and his sense of self

### **anomie**

a situation in which society no longer has the support of a firm collective consciousness

### **bourgeoisie**

the owners of the means of production in a society

### **capitalism**

a way of organizing an economy so that the things that are used to make and transport products (such as land, oil, factories, ships, etc.) are owned by individual people and companies rather than by the government

### **class consciousness**

the awareness of one's rank in society

### **collective conscience**

the communal beliefs, morals, and attitudes of a society

false consciousness

a person's beliefs and ideology that are in conflict with her best interests

iron cage

a situation in which an individual is trapped by social institutions

mechanical solidarity

a type of social order maintained by the collective consciousness of a culture

organic solidarity

a type of social order based around an acceptance of economic and social differences

proletariat

the laborers in a society

rationalization

a belief that modern society should be built around logic and efficiency rather than morality or tradition

social integration

how strongly a person is connected to his or her social group



## Social Constructions of Reality

- Understand the sociological concept of reality as a social construct
- Define roles and describe their places in people's daily interactions
- Explain how individuals present themselves and perceive themselves in a social context



Who are we? What role do we play in society? According to sociologists, we construct reality through our interactions with others. In a way, our day-to-day interactions are like those of actors on a stage.

(Photo courtesy of Jan Lewandowski/flickr)

Until now, we've primarily discussed the differences between societies. Rather than discuss their problems and configurations, we'll now explore how society came to be and how sociologists view social interaction.

In 1966 sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann wrote a book called *The Social Construction of Reality*. In it, they argued that society is created by humans and human interaction, which they call **habitualization**. Habitualization describes how "any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be ... performed again in the

future in the same manner and with the same economical effort” (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Not only do we construct our own society but we also accept it as it is because others have created it before us. Society is, in fact, “habit.”

For example, your school exists as a school and not just as a building because you and others agree that it is a school. If your school is older than you are, it was created by the agreement of others before you. In a sense, it exists by consensus, both prior and current. This is an example of the process of **institutionalization**, the act of implanting a convention or norm into society. Bear in mind that the institution, while socially constructed, is still quite real.

Another way of looking at this concept is through W.I. Thomas’s notable **Thomas theorem** which states, “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas 1928). That is, people’s behavior can be determined by their subjective construction of reality rather than by objective reality. For example, a teenager who is repeatedly given a label—overachiever, player, bum—might live up to the term even though it initially wasn’t a part of his character.

Like Berger and Luckmann in their description of habitualization, Thomas states that our moral codes and social norms are created by “successive definitions of the situation.” This concept is defined by sociologist Robert K. Merton as a **self-fulfilling prophecy**. Merton explains that with a self-fulfilling prophecy, even a false idea can become true if it is acted upon. One example he gives is of a “bank run.” Say for some reason, a number of people falsely fear that their bank is soon to be bankrupt. Because of this false notion, people run to their bank and demand all of their cash at once. As banks rarely, if ever, have that much money on hand, the bank does indeed run out of money, fulfilling the customers’ prophecy. Here, reality is constructed by an idea.

Symbolic interactionists offer another lens through which to analyze the social construction of reality. With a theoretical perspective focused on the symbols (like language, gestures, and artifacts) that people use to interact, this approach is interested in how people interpret those symbols in daily interactions. For example, we might feel fright at seeing a person holding a

gun, unless, of course, it turns out to be a police officer. Interactionists also recognize that language and body language reflect our values. One has only to learn a foreign tongue to know that not every English word can be easily translated into another language. The same is true for gestures. While Americans might recognize a “thumbs up” as meaning “great,” in Germany it would mean “one” and in Japan it would mean “five.” Thus, our construction of reality is influenced by our symbolic interactions.



The story line of a self-fulfilling prophecy appears in many literary works, perhaps most famously in the story of Oedipus.

Oedipus is told by an oracle that he will murder his father and marry his mother. In going out of his way to avoid his fate, Oedipus inadvertently fulfills it.

Oedipus's story illustrates one way in which members of society contribute to the social construction of reality.

(Photo courtesy of Jean-Antoine-Theodore Giroust/Wikimedia Commons)

## Roles and Status

As you can imagine, people employ many types of behaviors in day-to-day life. **Roles** are patterns of behavior that we recognize in each other that are representative of a person's social status. Currently, while reading this text, you are playing the role of a student. However, you also play other roles in your life, such as "daughter," "neighbor," or "employee." These various roles are each associated with a different status.

Sociologists use the term **status** to describe the responsibilities and benefits that a person experiences according to their rank and role in society. Some statuses are **ascribed**—those you do not select, such as son, elderly person, or female. Others, called **achieved statuses**, are obtained by choice, such as a high school dropout, self-made millionaire, or nurse. As a daughter or son, you occupy a different status than as a neighbor or employee. One person can be associated with a multitude of roles and statuses. Even a single status such as "student" has a complex **role-set**, or array of roles, attached to it (Merton 1957).

If too much is required of a single role, individuals can experience **role strain**. Consider the duties of a parent: cooking, cleaning, driving, problem-solving, acting as a source of moral guidance—the list goes on. Similarly, a person can experience **role conflict** when one or more roles are contradictory. A parent who also has a full-time career can experience role conflict on a daily basis. When there is a deadline at the office but a sick child needs to be picked up from school, which comes first? When you are working toward a promotion but your children want you to come to their school play, which do you choose? Being a college student can conflict with being an employee, being an athlete, or even being a friend. Our roles in life have a great effect on our decisions and who we become.

## Presentation of Self

Of course, it is impossible to look inside a person's head and study what role they are playing. All we can observe is behavior, or role performance. **Role performance** is how a person expresses his or her role. Sociologist Erving Goffman presented the idea that a person is like an actor on a stage. Calling his theory dramaturgy, Goffman believed that we use "impression management" to present ourselves to others as we hope to be perceived. Each situation is a new scene, and individuals perform different roles depending on who is present (Goffman 1959). Think about the way you behave around your coworkers versus the way you behave around your grandparents versus the way you behave with a blind date. Even if you're not consciously trying to alter your personality, your grandparents, coworkers, and date probably see different sides of you.

As in a play, the setting matters as well. If you have a group of friends over to your house for dinner, you are playing the role of a host. It is agreed upon that you will provide food and seating and probably be stuck with a lot of the cleanup at the end of the night. Similarly, your friends are playing the roles of guests, and they are expected to respect your property and any rules you may set forth ("Don't leave the door open or the cat will get out."). In any scene, there needs to be a shared reality between players. In this case, if you view yourself as a guest and others view you as a host, there are likely to be problems.

Impression management is a critical component of symbolic interactionism. For example, a judge in a courtroom has many "props" to create an impression of fairness, gravity, and control—like her robe and gavel. Those entering the courtroom are expected to adhere to the scene being set. Just imagine the "impression" that can be made by how a person dresses. This is the reason that attorneys frequently select the hairstyle and apparel for witnesses and defendants in courtroom proceedings.



Janus, another possible "prop",  
depicted with two heads,  
exemplifies war and peace.  
(Photo courtesy of Fubar  
Obfusco/Wikimedia Commons)

Goffman's dramaturgy ideas expand on the ideas of Charles Cooley and the **looking-glass self**. According to Cooley, we base our image on what we think other people see (Cooley 1902). We imagine how we must appear to others, then react to this speculation. We don certain clothes, prepare our hair in a particular manner, wear makeup, use cologne, and the like—all with the notion that our presentation of ourselves is going to affect how others perceive us. We expect a certain reaction, and, if lucky, we get the one we desire and feel good about it. But more than that, Cooley believed that our sense of self is based upon this idea: we imagine how we look to others, draw conclusions based upon their reactions to us, and then we develop our personal sense of self. In other words, people's reactions to us are like a mirror in which we are reflected.

## Summary

Society is based on the social construction of reality. How we define society influences how society actually is. Likewise, how we see other people influences their actions as well as our actions toward them. We all take on various roles throughout our lives, and our social interactions depend on what types of roles we assume, who we assume them with, and the scene where interaction takes place.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Mary works full-time at an office downtown while her young children stay at a neighbor's house. She's just learned that the childcare provider is leaving the country. Mary has succumbed to pressure to volunteer at her church, plus her ailing mother-in-law will be moving in with her next month. Which of the following is likely to occur as Mary tries to balance her existing and new responsibilities?

- a. Role strain
- b. Self-fulfilling prophecy
- c. Status conflict
- d. Status strain

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

A

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

According to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, society is based on \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. habitual actions

- b. status
- c. institutionalization
- d. role performance

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Paco knows that women find him attractive, and he's never found it hard to get a date. But as he ages, he dyes his hair to hide the gray and wears clothes that camouflage the weight he has put on. Paco's behavior can be best explained by the concept of \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. role strain
- b. the looking-glass self
- c. role performance
- d. habitualization

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**



**Problem:**

Draw a large circle, and then “slice” the circle into pieces like a pie, labeling each piece with a role or status that you occupy. Add as many statuses, ascribed and achieved, that you have. Don’t forget things like dog owner, gardener, traveler, student, runner, employee. How many statuses do you have? In which ones are there role conflicts?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Think of a self-fulfilling prophecy that you’ve experienced. Based on this experience, do you agree with the Thomas theorem? Use examples from current events to support your answer as well.

**Further Research**

TV Tropes is a website where users identify concepts that are commonly used in literature, film, and other media. Although its tone is for the most part humorous, the site provides a good jumping-off point for research. Browse the list of examples under the entry of “self-fulfilling prophecy.” Pay careful attention to the real-life examples. Are there ones that surprised you or that you don’t agree with? <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/tv-tropes>

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## **Glossary**

achieved status

the status a person chooses, such as a level of education or income

ascribed status

the status outside of an individual's control, such as sex or race

habitualization

the idea that society is constructed by us and those before us, and it is followed like a habit

institutionalization

the act of implanting a convention or norm into society

looking-glass self

our reflection of how we think we appear to others

roles

patterns of behavior that are representative of a person's social status

role-set

an array of roles attached to a particular status

role conflict

a situation when one or more of an individual's roles clash

role performance

the expression of a role

role strain

stress that occurs when too much is required of a single role

self-fulfilling prophecy

an idea that becomes true when acted upon

status

the responsibilities and benefits that a person experiences according to his or her rank and role in society

Thomas theorem

how a subjective reality can drive events to develop in accordance with that reality, despite being originally unsupported by objective reality

## Introduction to Social Stratification in the United States

class="introduction"

This house,  
formerly  
owned by the  
famous  
television  
producer,  
Aaron  
Spelling, was  
for a time  
listed for \$150  
million  
dollars. It is  
considered  
one of the  
most  
extravagant  
homes in the  
United States,  
and is a  
testament to  
the wealth  
generated in  
some  
industries.  
(Photo  
courtesy of  
Atwater  
Village  
Newbie/flickr  
)



Aaron grew up on a farm in rural Ohio, left home to serve in the Army, and returned a few years later to take over the family farm. He moved into the same house he had grown up in and soon married a young woman with whom he had attended high school. As they began to have children, they quickly realized that the income from the farm was no longer sufficient to meet their needs. Aaron, with little experience beyond the farm, accepted a job as a clerk at a local grocery store. It was there that his life and the lives of his wife and children were changed forever.

One of the managers at the store liked Aaron, his attitude, and his work ethic. He took Aaron under his wing and began to groom him for advancement at the store. Aaron rose through the ranks with ease. Then the manager encouraged him to take a few classes at a local college. This was the first time Aaron had seriously thought about college. Could he be successful, Aaron wondered? Could he actually be the first one in his family to earn a degree? Fortunately, his wife also believed in him and supported his decision to take his first class. Aaron asked his wife and his manager to keep his college enrollment a secret. He did not want others to know about it in case he failed.

Aaron was nervous on his first day of class. He was older than the other students, and he had never considered himself college material. Through hard work and determination, however, he did very well in the class. While he still doubted himself, he enrolled in another class. Again, he performed very well. As his doubt began to fade, he started to take more and more classes. Before he knew it, he was walking across the stage to receive a Bachelor's degree with honors. The ceremony seemed surreal to Aaron. He couldn't believe he had finished college, which once seemed like an impossible feat.

Shortly after graduation, Aaron was admitted into a graduate program at a well-respected university where he earned a Master's degree. He had not only become the first from his family to attend college but also he had earned a graduate degree. Inspired by Aaron's success, his wife enrolled at a technical college, obtained a degree in nursing, and became a registered nurse working in a local hospital's labor and delivery department. Aaron and his wife both worked their way up the career ladder in their respective fields and became leaders in their organizations. They epitomized the American Dream—they worked hard and it paid off.

This story may sound familiar. After all, nearly one in three first-year college students is a first-generation degree candidate, and it is well documented that many are not as successful as Aaron. According to the Center for Student Opportunity, a national nonprofit, 89 percent of first-generation students will not earn an undergraduate degree within six years of starting their studies. In fact, these students “drop out of college at four times the rate of peers whose parents have postsecondary degrees” (Center for Student Opportunity quoted in Huot 2014).

Why do students with parents who have completed college tend to graduate more often than those students whose parents do not hold degrees? That question and many others will be answered as we explore social stratification.

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## What Is Social Stratification?

- Differentiate between open and closed stratification systems
- Distinguish between caste and class systems
- Understand meritocracy as an ideal system of stratification



In the upper echelons of the working world, people with the most power reach the top. These people make the decisions and earn the most money. The majority of Americans will never see the view from the top. (Photo courtesy of Alex Proimos/flickr)

Sociologists use the term social stratification to describe the system of social standing. **Social stratification** refers to a society's categorization of its people into rankings of socioeconomic tiers based on factors like wealth, income, race, education, and power.

You may remember the word “stratification” from geology class. The distinct vertical layers found in rock, called stratification, are a good way to visualize social structure. Society's layers are made of people, and society's resources are distributed unevenly throughout the layers. The people who have more resources represent the top layer of the social structure of



stratification. Other groups of people, with progressively fewer and fewer resources, represent the lower layers of our society.



Strata in rock illustrate social stratification. People are sorted, or layered, into social categories. Many factors determine a person's social standing, such as income, education, occupation, as well as age, race, gender, and even physical abilities. (Photo courtesy of Just a Prairie Boy/flickr)

In the United States, people like to believe everyone has an equal chance at success. To a certain extent, Aaron illustrates the belief that hard work and talent—not prejudicial treatment or societal values—determine social rank. This emphasis on self-effort perpetuates the belief that people control their own social standing.

However, sociologists recognize that social stratification is a society-wide system that makes inequalities apparent. While there are always inequalities between individuals, sociologists are interested in larger social patterns. Stratification is not about individual inequalities, but about systematic inequalities based on group membership, classes, and the like. No individual, rich or poor, can be blamed for social inequalities. The structure of society affects a person's social standing. Although individuals may support or fight inequalities, social stratification is created and supported by society as a whole.



The people who live in these houses most likely share similar levels of income and education. Neighborhoods often house people of the same social standing. Wealthy families do not typically live next door to poorer families, though this varies depending on the particular city and country.  
(Photo courtesy of Orin Zebest/flickr)

Factors that define stratification vary in different societies. In most societies, stratification is an economic system, based on **wealth**, the net value of money and assets a person has, and **income**, a person's wages or investment dividends. While people are regularly categorized based on how rich or poor they are, other important factors influence social standing. For example, in some cultures, wisdom and charisma are valued, and people who have them are revered more than those who don't. In some cultures, the elderly are esteemed; in others, the elderly are disparaged or overlooked. Societies' cultural beliefs often reinforce the inequalities of stratification.

One key determinant of social standing is the social standing of our parents. Parents tend to pass their social position on to their children. People inherit not only social standing but also the cultural norms that accompany a certain lifestyle. They share these with a network of friends and family members. Social standing becomes a comfort zone, a familiar lifestyle, and an identity. This is one of the reasons first-generation college students do not fare as well as other students.

Other determinants are found in a society's occupational structure. Teachers, for example, often have high levels of education but receive relatively low pay. Many believe that teaching is a noble profession, so teachers should do their jobs for love of their profession and the good of their students—not for money. Yet no successful executive or entrepreneur would embrace that attitude in the business world, where profits are valued as a driving force. Cultural attitudes and beliefs like these support and perpetuate social inequalities.

## **Recent Economic Changes and U.S. Stratification**

As a result of the Great Recession that rocked our nation's economy in the last few years, many families and individuals found themselves struggling like never before. The nation fell into a period of prolonged and exceptionally high unemployment. While no one was completely insulated from the recession, perhaps those in the lower classes felt the impact most profoundly. Before the recession, many were living paycheck to paycheck

or even had been living comfortably. As the recession hit, they were often among the first to lose their jobs. Unable to find replacement employment, they faced more than loss of income. Their homes were foreclosed, their cars were repossessed, and their ability to afford healthcare was taken away. This put many in the position of deciding whether to put food on the table or fill a needed prescription.

While we're not completely out of the woods economically, there are several signs that we're on the road to recovery. Many of those who suffered during the recession are back to work and are busy rebuilding their lives. The Affordable Health Care Act has provided health insurance to millions who lost or never had it.

But the Great Recession, like the Great Depression, has changed social attitudes. Where once it was important to demonstrate wealth by wearing expensive clothing items like Calvin Klein shirts and Louis Vuitton shoes, now there's a new, thriftier way of thinking. In many circles, it has become hip to be frugal. It's no longer about how much we spend, but about how much we don't spend. Think of shows like *Extreme Couponing* on TLC and songs like Macklemore's "Thrift Shop."

## **Systems of Stratification**

Sociologists distinguish between two types of systems of stratification. Closed systems accommodate little change in social position. They do not allow people to shift levels and do not permit social relationships between levels. Open systems, which are based on achievement, allow movement and interaction between layers and classes. Different systems reflect, emphasize, and foster certain cultural values and shape individual beliefs. Stratification systems include class systems and caste systems, as well as meritocracy.

### **The Caste System**



India used to have a rigid caste system. The people in the lowest caste suffered from extreme poverty and were shunned by society. Some aspects of India's defunct caste system remain socially relevant. In this photo, an Indian woman of a specific Hindu caste works in construction, and she demolishes and builds houses. (Photo courtesy of Elessar/flickr)

Caste systems are closed stratification systems in which people can do little or nothing to change their social standing. A **caste system** is one in which people are born into their social standing and will remain in it their whole lives. People are assigned occupations regardless of their talents, interests, or potential. There are virtually no opportunities to improve a person's social position.

In the Hindu caste tradition, people were expected to work in the occupation of their caste and to enter into marriage according to their caste. Accepting this social standing was considered a moral duty. Cultural values reinforced the system. Caste systems promote beliefs in fate, destiny, and the will of a higher power, rather than promoting individual freedom as a

value. A person who lived in a caste society was socialized to accept his or her social standing.

Although the caste system in India has been officially dismantled, its residual presence in Indian society is deeply embedded. In rural areas, aspects of the tradition are more likely to remain, while urban centers show less evidence of this past. In India's larger cities, people now have more opportunities to choose their own career paths and marriage partners. As a global center of employment, corporations have introduced merit-based hiring and employment to the nation.

## **The Class System**

A **class system** is based on both social factors and individual achievement. A **class** consists of a set of people who share similar status with regard to factors like wealth, income, education, and occupation. Unlike caste systems, class systems are open. People are free to gain a different level of education or employment than their parents. They can also socialize with and marry members of other classes, which allows people to move from one class to another.

In a class system, occupation is not fixed at birth. Though family and other societal models help guide a person toward a career, personal choice plays a role.

In class systems, people have the option to form **exogamous marriages**, unions of spouses from different social categories. Marriage in these circumstances is based on values such as love and compatibility rather than on social standing or economics. Though social conformities still exist that encourage people to choose partners within their own class, people are not as pressured to choose marriage partners based solely on those elements. Marriage to a partner from the same social background is an **endogamous union**.

## Meritocracy

**Meritocracy** is an ideal system based on the belief that social stratification is the result of personal effort—or merit—that determines social standing. High levels of effort will lead to a high social position, and vice versa. The concept of meritocracy is an ideal—because a society has never existed where social rank was based purely on merit. Because of the complex structure of societies, processes like socialization, and the realities of economic systems, social standing is influenced by multiple factors—not merit alone. Inheritance and pressure to conform to norms, for instance, disrupt the notion of a pure meritocracy. While a meritocracy has never existed, sociologists see aspects of meritocracies in modern societies when they study the role of academic and job performance and the systems in place for evaluating and rewarding achievement in these areas.

## Status Consistency

Social stratification systems determine social position based on factors like income, education, and occupation. Sociologists use the term **status consistency** to describe the consistency, or lack thereof, of an individual's rank across these factors. Caste systems correlate with high status consistency, whereas the more flexible class system has lower status consistency.

To illustrate, let's consider Susan. Susan earned her high school degree but did not go to college. That factor is a trait of the lower-middle class. She began doing landscaping work, which, as manual labor, is also a trait of lower-middle class or even lower class. However, over time, Susan started her own company. She hired employees. She won larger contracts. She became a business owner and earned a lot of money. Those traits represent the upper-middle class. There are inconsistencies between Susan's educational level, her occupation, and her income. In a class system, a person can work hard and have little education and still be in middle or upper class, whereas in a caste system that would not be possible. In a class system, low status consistency correlates with having more choices and opportunities.



**Note:****The Commoner Who Could Be Queen**

Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, who is in line to be king of England, married Catherine Middleton, a so-called commoner, meaning she does not have royal ancestry.  
(Photo courtesy of UK\_repsome/flickr)

On April 29, 2011, in London, England, Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, married Catherine Middleton, a commoner. It is rare, though not unheard of, for a member of the British royal family to marry a commoner. Kate Middleton has an upper-class background, but does not have royal ancestry. Her father was a former flight dispatcher and her mother a former flight attendant and owner of Party Pieces. According to Grace Wong's 2011 article titled, "Kate Middleton: A family business that built a princess," "[t]he business grew to the point where [her father] quit his job . . . and it's evolved from a mom-and-pop outfit run out of a shed . . . into a venture operated out of three converted farm buildings in Berkshire." Kate and William met when they were both students at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland (Köhler 2010).

Britain's monarchy arose during the Middle Ages. Its social hierarchy placed royalty at the top and commoners on the bottom. This was generally a closed system, with people born into positions of nobility. Wealth was



passed from generation to generation through **primogeniture**, a law stating that all property would be inherited by the firstborn son. If the family had no son, the land went to the next closest male relation. Women could not inherit property, and their social standing was primarily determined through marriage.

The arrival of the Industrial Revolution changed Britain's social structure. Commoners moved to cities, got jobs, and made better livings. Gradually, people found new opportunities to increase their wealth and power. Today, the government is a constitutional monarchy with the prime minister and other ministers elected to their positions, and with the royal family's role being largely ceremonial. The long-ago differences between nobility and commoners have blurred, and the modern class system in Britain is similar to that of the United States (McKee 1996).

Today, the royal family still commands wealth, power, and a great deal of attention. When Queen Elizabeth II retires or passes away, Prince Charles will be first in line to ascend the throne. If he abdicates (chooses not to become king) or dies, the position will go to Prince William. If that happens, Kate Middleton will be called Queen Catherine and hold the position of queen consort. She will be one of the few queens in history to have earned a college degree (Marquand 2011).

There is a great deal of social pressure on her not only to behave as a royal but also to bear children. In fact, Kate and Prince William welcomed their first son, Prince George, on July 22, 2013 and are expecting their second child. The royal family recently changed its succession laws to allow daughters, not just sons, to ascend the throne. Kate's experience—from commoner to potential queen—demonstrates the fluidity of social position in modern society.

## Summary

Stratification systems are either closed, meaning they allow little change in social position, or open, meaning they allow movement and interaction between the layers. A caste system is one in which social standing is based on ascribed status or birth. Class systems are open, with achievement playing a role in social position. People fall into classes based on factors

like wealth, income, education, and occupation. A meritocracy is a system of social stratification that confers standing based on personal worth, rewarding effort.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** What factor makes caste systems closed?

- a. They are run by secretive governments.
- b. People cannot change their social standings.
- c. Most have been outlawed.
- d. They exist only in rural areas.

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

### Exercise:

**Problem:** What factor makes class systems open?

- a. They allow for movement between the classes.
- b. People are more open-minded.
- c. People are encouraged to socialize within their class.
- d. They do not have clearly defined layers.

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Which of these systems allows for the most social mobility?

- a. Caste
- b. Monarchy
- c. Endogamy
- d. Class

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which person best illustrates opportunities for upward social mobility in the United States?

- a. First-shift factory worker
- b. First-generation college student
- c. Firstborn son who inherits the family business
- d. First-time interviewee who is hired for a job

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Which statement illustrates low status consistency?

- a. A suburban family lives in a modest ranch home and enjoys a nice vacation each summer.

- b. A single mother receives food stamps and struggles to find adequate employment.
- c. A college dropout launches an online company that earns millions in its first year.
- d. A celebrity actress owns homes in three countries.

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Based on meritocracy, a physician's assistant would:

- a. receive the same pay as all the other physician's assistants
- b. be encouraged to earn a higher degree to seek a better position
- c. most likely marry a professional at the same level
- d. earn a pay raise for doing excellent work

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Track the social stratification of your family tree. Did the social standing of your parents differ from the social standing of your grandparents and great-grandparents? What social traits were handed down by your forebears? Are there any exogamous marriages in your history? Does your family exhibit status consistencies or inconsistencies?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

What defines communities that have low status consistency? What are the ramifications, both positive and negative, of cultures with low status consistency? Try to think of specific examples to support your ideas.

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Review the concept of stratification. Now choose a group of people you have observed and been a part of—for example, cousins, high school friends, classmates, sport teammates, or coworkers. How does the structure of the social group you chose adhere to the concept of stratification?

**Further Research**

The *New York Times* investigated social stratification in their series of articles called “Class Matters.” The online accompaniment to the series includes an interactive graphic called “How Class Works,” which tallies four factors—occupation, education, income, and wealth—and places an individual within a certain class and percentile. What class describes you? Test your class rank on the interactive site:

[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/NY\\_Times\\_how\\_class\\_works](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/NY_Times_how_class_works)

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## Glossary

caste system

a system in which people are born into a social standing that they will retain their entire lives

class

a group who shares a common social status based on factors like wealth, income, education, and occupation

class system

social standing based on social factors and individual accomplishments

endogamous marriages

unions of people within the same social category

exogamous unions

unions of spouses from different social categories

income

the money a person earns from work or investments

meritocracy

an ideal system in which personal effort—or merit—determines social standing

primogeniture

a law stating that all property passes to the firstborn son

social stratification

a socioeconomic system that divides society's members into categories ranking from high to low, based on things like wealth, power, and prestige

status consistency

the consistency, or lack thereof, of an individual's rank across social categories like income, education, and occupation

wealth

the value of money and assets a person has from, for example, inheritance

## Social Stratification and Mobility in the United States

- Understand the U.S. class structure
- Describe several types of social mobility
- Recognize characteristics that define and identify class

Most sociologists define social class as a grouping based on similar social factors like wealth, income, education, and occupation. These factors affect how much power and prestige a person has. Social stratification reflects an unequal distribution of resources. In most cases, having more money means having more power or more opportunities. Stratification can also result from physical and intellectual traits. Categories that affect social standing include family ancestry, race, ethnicity, age, and gender. In the United States, standing can also be defined by characteristics such as IQ, athletic abilities, appearance, personal skills, and achievements.

## Standard of Living

In the last century, the United States has seen a steady rise in its **standard of living**, the level of wealth available to a certain socioeconomic class in order to acquire the material necessities and comforts to maintain its lifestyle. The standard of living is based on factors such as income, employment, class, poverty rates, and housing affordability. Because standard of living is closely related to quality of life, it can represent factors such as the ability to afford a home, own a car, and take vacations.

In the United States, a small portion of the population has the means to the highest standard of living. A Federal Reserve Bank study shows that a mere one percent of the population holds one-third of our nation's wealth (Kennickell 2009). Wealthy people receive the most schooling, have better health, and consume the most goods and services. Wealthy people also wield decision-making power. Many people think of the United States as a "middle-class society." They think a few people are rich, a few are poor, and most are fairly well off, existing in the middle of the social strata. But as the study mentioned above indicates, there is not an even distribution of wealth. Millions of women and men struggle to pay rent, buy food, find work, and afford basic medical care. Women who are single heads of



household tend to have a lower income and lower standard of living than their married or male counterparts. This is a worldwide phenomenon known as the “feminization of poverty”—which acknowledges that women disproportionately make up the majority of individuals in poverty across the globe.

In the United States, as in most high-income nations, social stratifications and standards of living are in part based on occupation (Lin and Xie 1988). Aside from the obvious impact that income has on someone’s standard of living, occupations also influence social standing through the relative levels of prestige they afford. Employment in medicine, law, or engineering confers high status. Teachers and police officers are generally respected, though not considered particularly prestigious. At the other end of the scale, some of the lowest rankings apply to positions like waitress, janitor, and bus driver.

The most significant threat to the relatively high standard of living we’re accustomed to in the United States is the decline of the middle class. The size, income, and wealth of the middle class have all been declining since the 1970s. This is occurring at a time when corporate profits have increased more than 141 percent, and CEO pay has risen by more than 298 percent (Popken 2007).

G. William Domhoff, of the University of California at Santa Cruz, reports that “In 2010, the top 1% of households (the upper class) owned 35.4% of all privately held wealth, and the next 19% (the managerial, professional, and small business stratum) had 53.5%, which means that just 20% of the people owned a remarkable 89%, leaving only 11% of the wealth for the bottom 80% (wage and salary workers)” (Domhoff 2013).

While several economic factors can be improved in the United States (inequitable distribution of income and wealth, feminization of poverty, stagnant wages for most workers while executive pay and profits soar, declining middle class), we are fortunate that the poverty experienced here is most often relative poverty and not absolute poverty. Whereas absolute poverty is deprivation so severe that it puts survival in jeopardy, relative poverty is not having the means to live the lifestyle of the average person in your country.

As a wealthy developed country, the United States has the resources to provide the basic necessities to those in need through a series of federal and state social welfare programs. The best-known of these programs is likely the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is administered by the United States Department of Agriculture. (This used to be known as the food stamp program.)

The program began in the Great Depression, when unmarketable or surplus food was distributed to the hungry. It was not until 1961 that President John F. Kennedy initiated a food stamp pilot program. His successor Lyndon B. Johnson was instrumental in the passage of the Food Stamp Act in 1964. In 1965, more than 500,000 individuals received food assistance. In March 2008, on the precipice of the Great Recession, participation hovered around 28 million people. During the recession, that number escalated to more than 40 million (USDA).

## **Social Classes in the United States**



Does taste or fashion sense indicate class? Is there any way to tell if this young man comes from an upper-, middle-, or lower-class background? (Photo courtesy of Kelly Bailey/flickr)

Does a person's appearance indicate class? Can you tell a man's education level based on his clothing? Do you know a woman's income by the car she drives?

For sociologists, categorizing class is a fluid science. Sociologists generally identify three levels of class in the United States: upper, middle, and lower class. Within each class, there are many subcategories. Wealth is the most significant way of distinguishing classes, because wealth can be transferred to one's children and perpetuate the class structure. One economist, J.D. Foster, defines the 20 percent of U.S. citizens' highest earners as "upper income," and the lower 20 percent as "lower income." The remaining 60 percent of the population make up the middle class. But by that distinction, annual household incomes for the middle class range between \$25,000 and \$100,000 (Mason and Sullivan 2010).

One sociological perspective distinguishes the classes, in part, according to their relative power and control over their lives. The upper class not only have power and control over their own lives but also their social status gives them power and control over others' lives. The middle class doesn't generally control other strata of society, but its members do exert control over their own lives. In contrast, the lower class has little control over their work or lives. Below, we will explore the major divisions of U.S. social class and their key subcategories.

## **Upper Class**



Members of the upper class can afford to live, work, and play in exclusive places designed for luxury and comfort. (Photo courtesy of [PrimeImageMedia.com/flickr](https://www.primeimagemedia.com/flickr))

The upper class is considered the top, and only the powerful elite get to see the view from there. In the United States, people with extreme wealth make up 1 percent of the population, and they own one-third of the country's wealth (Beeghley 2008).

Money provides not just access to material goods, but also access to a lot of power. As corporate leaders, members of the upper class make decisions that affect the job status of millions of people. As media owners, they influence the collective identity of the nation. They run the major network television stations, radio broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, and sports franchises. As board members of the most influential colleges and universities, they influence cultural attitudes and values. As philanthropists, they establish foundations to support social causes they believe in. As campaign contributors, they sway politicians and fund campaigns, sometimes to protect their own economic interests.

U.S. society has historically distinguished between “old money” (inherited wealth passed from one generation to the next) and “new money” (wealth you have earned and built yourself). While both types may have equal net

worth, they have traditionally held different social standings. People of old money, firmly situated in the upper class for generations, have held high prestige. Their families have socialized them to know the customs, norms, and expectations that come with wealth. Often, the very wealthy don't work for wages. Some study business or become lawyers in order to manage the family fortune. Others, such as Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian, capitalize on being a rich socialite and transform that into celebrity status, flaunting a wealthy lifestyle.

However, new-money members of the upper class are not oriented to the customs and mores of the elite. They haven't gone to the most exclusive schools. They have not established old-money social ties. People with new money might flaunt their wealth, buying sports cars and mansions, but they might still exhibit behaviors attributed to the middle and lower classes.

## **The Middle Class**



These members of a club likely consider themselves middle class. (Photo courtesy of United Way Canada-Centraide Canada/flickr)

Many people consider themselves middle class, but there are differing ideas about what that means. People with annual incomes of \$150,000 call themselves middle class, as do people who annually earn \$30,000. That helps explain why, in the United States, the middle class is broken into upper and lower subcategories.

Upper-middle-class people tend to hold bachelor's and postgraduate degrees. They've studied subjects such as business, management, law, or medicine. Lower-middle-class members hold bachelor's degrees from four-year colleges or associate's degrees from two-year community or technical colleges.

Comfort is a key concept to the middle class. Middle-class people work hard and live fairly comfortable lives. Upper-middle-class people tend to pursue careers that earn comfortable incomes. They provide their families with large homes and nice cars. They may go skiing or boating on vacation. Their children receive high-quality education and healthcare (Gilbert 2010).

In the lower middle class, people hold jobs supervised by members of the upper middle class. They fill technical, lower-level management or administrative support positions. Compared to lower-class work, lower-middle-class jobs carry more prestige and come with slightly higher paychecks. With these incomes, people can afford a decent, mainstream lifestyle, but they struggle to maintain it. They generally don't have enough income to build significant savings. In addition, their grip on class status is more precarious than in the upper tiers of the class system. When budgets are tight, lower-middle-class people are often the ones to lose their jobs.

## **The Lower Class**



This man is a custodian at a restaurant. His job, which is crucial to the business, is considered lower class. (Photo courtesy of Frederick Md Publicity/flickr)

The lower class is also referred to as the working class. Just like the middle and upper classes, the lower class can be divided into subsets: the working class, the working poor, and the underclass. Compared to the lower middle class, lower-class people have less of an educational background and earn smaller incomes. They work jobs that require little prior skill or experience and often do routine tasks under close supervision.

Working-class people, the highest subcategory of the lower class, often land decent jobs in fields like custodial or food service. The work is hands-on and often physically demanding, such as landscaping, cooking, cleaning, or building.

Beneath the working class is the working poor. Like the working class, they have unskilled, low-paying employment. However, their jobs rarely offer benefits such as healthcare or retirement planning, and their positions are often seasonal or temporary. They work as sharecroppers, migrant farm

workers, housecleaners, and day laborers. Some are high school dropouts. Some are illiterate, unable to read job ads.

How can people work full-time and still be poor? Even working full-time, millions of the working poor earn incomes too meager to support a family. Minimum wage varies from state to state, but in many states it is approaching \$8.00 per hour (Department of Labor 2014). At that rate, working 40 hours a week earns \$320. That comes to \$16,640 a year, before tax and deductions. Even for a single person, the pay is low. A married couple with children will have a hard time covering expenses.

The underclass is the United States' lowest tier. Members of the underclass live mainly in inner cities. Many are unemployed or underemployed. Those who do hold jobs typically perform menial tasks for little pay. Some of the underclass are homeless. For many, welfare systems provide a much-needed support through food assistance, medical care, housing, and the like.

## **Social Mobility**

**Social mobility** refers to the ability to change positions within a social stratification system. When people improve or diminish their economic status in a way that affects social class, they experience social mobility.

Individuals can experience upward or downward social mobility for a variety of reasons. **Upward mobility** refers to an increase—or upward shift—in social class. In the United States, people applaud the rags-to-riches achievements of celebrities like Jennifer Lopez or Michael Jordan. Bestselling author Stephen King worked as a janitor prior to being published. Oprah Winfrey grew up in poverty in rural Mississippi before becoming a powerful media personality. There are many stories of people rising from modest beginnings to fame and fortune. But the truth is that relative to the overall population, the number of people who rise from poverty to wealth is very small. Still, upward mobility is not only about becoming rich and famous. In the United States, people who earn a college degree, get a job promotion, or marry someone with a good income may move up socially. In contrast, **downward mobility** indicates a lowering of one's social class. Some people move downward because of business



setbacks, unemployment, or illness. Dropping out of school, losing a job, or getting a divorce may result in a loss of income or status and, therefore, downward social mobility.

It is not uncommon for different generations of a family to belong to varying social classes. This is known as **intergenerational mobility**. For example, an upper-class executive may have parents who belonged to the middle class. In turn, those parents may have been raised in the lower class. Patterns of intergenerational mobility can reflect long-term societal changes.

Similarly, **intragenerational mobility** refers to changes in a person's social mobility over the course of his or her lifetime. For example, the wealth and prestige experienced by one person may be quite different from that of his or her siblings.

**Structural mobility** happens when societal changes enable a whole group of people to move up or down the social class ladder. Structural mobility is attributable to changes in society as a whole, not individual changes. In the first half of the twentieth century, industrialization expanded the U.S. economy, raising the standard of living and leading to upward structural mobility. In today's work economy, the recent recession and the outsourcing of jobs overseas have contributed to high unemployment rates. Many people have experienced economic setbacks, creating a wave of downward structural mobility.

When analyzing the trends and movements in social mobility, sociologists consider all modes of mobility. Scholars recognize that mobility is not as common or easy to achieve as many people think. In fact, some consider social mobility a myth.

## **Class Traits**

**Class traits**, also called class markers, are the typical behaviors, customs, and norms that define each class. Class traits indicate the level of exposure a person has to a wide range of cultures. Class traits also indicate the

amount of resources a person has to spend on items like hobbies, vacations, and leisure activities.

People may associate the upper class with enjoyment of costly, refined, or highly cultivated tastes—expensive clothing, luxury cars, high-end fundraisers, and opulent vacations. People may also believe that the middle and lower classes are more likely to enjoy camping, fishing, or hunting, shopping at large retailers, and participating in community activities. While these descriptions may identify class traits, they may also simply be stereotypes. Moreover, just as class distinctions have blurred in recent decades, so too have class traits. A very wealthy person may enjoy bowling as much as opera. A factory worker could be a skilled French cook. A billionaire might dress in ripped jeans, and a low-income student might own designer shoes.

**Note:**

**Turn-of-the-Century “Social Problem Novels”:** Sociological Gold Mines  
Class distinctions were sharper in the nineteenth century and earlier, in part because people easily accepted them. The ideology of social order made class structure seem natural, right, and just.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, U.S. and British novelists played a role in changing public perception. They published novels in which characters struggled to survive against a merciless class system. These dissenting authors used gender and morality to question the class system and expose its inequalities. They protested the suffering of urbanization and industrialization, drawing attention to these issues.

These “social problem novels,” sometimes called Victorian realism, forced middle-class readers into an uncomfortable position: they had to question and challenge the natural order of social class.

For speaking out so strongly about the social issues of class, authors were both praised and criticized. Most authors did not want to dissolve the class system. They wanted to bring about an awareness that would improve conditions for the lower classes, while maintaining their own higher class positions (DeVine 2005).

Soon, middle-class readers were not their only audience. In 1870, Forster's Elementary Education Act required all children ages five through twelve in England and Wales to attend school. The act increased literacy levels among the urban poor, causing a rise in sales of cheap newspapers and magazines. The increasing number of people who rode public transit systems created a demand for "railway literature," as it was called (Williams 1984). These reading materials are credited with the move toward democratization in England. By 1900 the British middle class had established a rigid definition for itself, and England's working class also began to self-identify and demand a better way of life.

Many of the novels of that era are seen as sociological goldmines. They are studied as existing sources because they detail the customs and mores of the upper, middle, and lower classes of that period in history.

Examples of "social problem" novels include Charles Dickens's *The Adventures of Oliver Twist* (1838), which shocked readers with its brutal portrayal of the realities of poverty, vice, and crime. Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) was considered revolutionary by critics for its depiction of working-class women (DeVine 2005), and U.S. novelist Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) portrayed an accurate and detailed description of early Chicago.

## Summary

There are three main classes in the United States: upper, middle, and lower class. Social mobility describes a shift from one social class to another. Class traits, also called class markers, are the typical behaviors, customs, and norms that define each class.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** In the United States, most people define themselves as:

- a. middle class

- b. upper class
- c. lower class
- d. no specific class

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Structural mobility occurs when:

- a. an individual moves up the class ladder
- b. an individual moves down the class ladder
- c. a large group moves up or down the class ladder due to societal changes
- d. a member of a family belongs to a different class than his or her siblings

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

The behaviors, customs, and norms associated with a class are known as:

- a. class traits
  - b. power
  - c. prestige
  - d. underclass
-

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following scenarios is an example of intragenerational mobility?

- a. A janitor belongs to the same social class as his grandmother did.
- b. An executive belongs to a different class than her parents.
- c. An editor shares the same social class as his cousin.
- d. A lawyer belongs to a different class than her sister.

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Occupational prestige means that jobs are:

- a. all equal in status
- b. not equally valued
- c. assigned to a person for life
- d. not part of a person's self-identity

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Which social class do you and your family belong to? Are you in a different social class than your grandparents and great-grandparents? Does your class differ from your social standing, and, if so, how? What aspects of your societal situation establish you in a social class?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

What class traits define your peer group? For example, what speech patterns or clothing trends do you and your friends share? What cultural elements, such as taste in music or hobbies, define your peer group? How do you see this set of class traits as different from other classes either above or below yours?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Write a list of ten to twenty class traits that describe the environment of your upbringing. Which of these seem like true class traits, and which seem like stereotypes? What items might fall into both categories? How do you imagine a sociologist might address the conflation of class traits and stereotypes?

**Further Research**

PBS made a documentary about social class called “People Like Us: Social Class in America.” The filmmakers interviewed people who lived in Park Avenue penthouses and Appalachian trailer parks. The accompanying web site is full of information, interactive games, and life stories from those who participated. Read about it at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/social\\_class\\_in\\_America](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/social_class_in_America)

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## Glossary

### class traits

the typical behaviors, customs, and norms that define each class (also called class markers)

### downward mobility

a lowering of one's social class

### intergenerational mobility

a difference in social class between different generations of a family

### intragenerational mobility

a difference in social class between different members of the same generation

### social mobility

the ability to change positions within a social stratification system

### standard of living

the level of wealth available to acquire material goods and comforts to maintain a particular socioeconomic lifestyle

### structural mobility

a societal change that enables a whole group of people to move up or down the class ladder

### upward mobility

an increase—or upward shift—in social class



## Global Stratification and Inequality

- Define global stratification
- Describe different sociological models for understanding global stratification
- Understand how studies of global stratification identify worldwide inequalities



A family lives in this grass hut in Ethiopia. Another family lives in a single-wide trailer in the trailer park in the United States. Both families are considered poor, or lower class. With such differences in global stratification, what constitutes poverty? (Photo (a) courtesy of Canned Muffins/flickr; Photo (b) courtesy of Herb Neufeld/flickr)

**Global stratification** compares the wealth, economic stability, status, and power of countries across the world. Global stratification highlights worldwide patterns of social inequality.

In the early years of civilization, hunter-gatherer and agrarian societies lived off the earth and rarely interacted with other societies. When explorers began traveling, societies began trading goods, as well as ideas and customs.

In the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution created unprecedented wealth in Western Europe and North America. Due to mechanical inventions and new means of production, people began working in factories

—not only men, but women and children as well. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, industrial technology had gradually raised the standard of living for many people in the United States and Europe.

The Industrial Revolution also saw the rise of vast inequalities between countries that were industrialized and those that were not. As some nations embraced technology and saw increased wealth and goods, others maintained their ways; as the gap widened, the nonindustrialized nations fell further behind. Some social researchers, such as Walt Rostow, suggest that the disparity also resulted from power differences. Applying a conflict theory perspective, he asserts that industrializing nations took advantage of the resources of traditional nations. As industrialized nations became rich, other nations became poor (Rostow 1960).

Sociologists studying global stratification analyze economic comparisons between nations. Income, purchasing power, and wealth are used to calculate global stratification. Global stratification also compares the quality of life that a country's population can have.

Poverty levels have been shown to vary greatly. The poor in wealthy countries like the United States or Europe are much better off than the poor in less-industrialized countries such as Mali or India. In 2002, the UN implemented the Millennium Project, an attempt to cut poverty worldwide by the year 2015. To reach the project's goal, planners in 2006 estimated that industrialized nations must set aside 0.7 percent of their gross national income—the total value of the nation's good and service, plus or minus income received from and sent to other nations—to aid in developing countries (Landler and Sanger, 2009; Millennium Project 2006).

## **Models of Global Stratification**



Luxury vacation resorts can contribute to a poorer country's economy. This one, in Jamaica, attracts middle and upper-middle class people from wealthier nations. The resort is a source of income and provides jobs for local people. Just outside its borders, however, are poverty-stricken neighborhoods. (Photo courtesy of gailf548/flickr)

Various models of global stratification all have one thing in common: they rank countries according to their relative economic status, or gross national product (GNP). Traditional models, now considered outdated, used labels to describe the stratification of the different areas of the world. Simply put, they were named "first world," "second world," and "third world." First and second world described industrialized nations, while third world referred to "undeveloped" countries (Henslin 2004). When researching existing historical sources, you may still encounter these terms, and even today people still refer to some nations as the "third world."

Another model separates countries into two groups: more developed and less developed. More-developed nations have higher wealth, such as Canada, Japan, and Australia. Less-developed nations have less wealth to distribute among higher populations, including many countries in central Africa, South America, and some island nations.

Yet another system of global classification defines countries based on the per capita gross domestic product (GDP), a country's average national wealth per person. The GDP is calculated (usually annually) one of two ways: by totaling either the income of all citizens or the value of all goods and services produced in the country during the year. It also includes government spending. Because the GDP indicates a country's productivity and performance, comparing GDP rates helps establish a country's economic health in relation to other countries.

The figures also establish a country's standard of living. According to this analysis, a GDP standard of a middle-income nation represents a global average. In low-income countries, most people are poor relative to people in other countries. Citizens have little access to amenities such as electricity, plumbing, and clean water. People in low-income countries are not guaranteed education, and many are illiterate. The life expectancy of citizens is lower than in high-income countries.

**Note:****The Big Picture: Calculating Global Stratification**

A few organizations take on the job of comparing the wealth of nations. The Population Reference Bureau (PRB) is one of them. Besides a focus on population data, the PRB publishes an annual report that measures the relative economic well-being of all the world's countries. It's called the Gross National Income (GNI) and Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).

The GNI measures the current value of goods and services produced by a country. The PPP measures the relative power a country has to purchase those same goods and services. So, GNI refers to productive output and PPP refers to buying power. The total figure is divided by the number of residents living in a country to establish the average income of a resident of that country.

Because costs of goods and services vary from one country to the next, the GNI PPP converts figures into a relative international unit. Calculating GNI PPP figures helps researchers accurately compare countries' standard of living. They allow the United Nations and Population Reference Bureau to compare and rank the wealth of all countries and consider international stratification issues (nationsonline.org).

## Summary

Global stratification compares the wealth, economic stability, status, and power of countries as a whole. By comparing income and productivity between nations, researchers can better identify global inequalities.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Social stratification is a system that:

- a. ranks society members into categories
- b. destroys competition between society members
- c. allows society members to choose their social standing
- d. reflects personal choices of society members

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

### Exercise:

**Problem:**

Which graphic concept best illustrates the concept of social stratification?

- a. Pie chart
  - b. Flag poles
  - c. Planetary movement
  - d. Pyramid
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** The GNI PPP figure represents:

- a. a country's total accumulated wealth
  - b. annual government spending
  - c. the average annual income of a country's citizens
  - d. a country's debt
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Why is it important to understand and be aware of global stratification? Make a list of specific issues that are related to global stratification. For inspiration, turn on a news channel or read the newspaper. Next, choose a topic from your list, and look at it more closely. Who is affected by this issue? How is the issue specifically related to global stratification?

## Exercise:

### Problem:

Compare a family that lives in a grass hut in Ethiopia to an American family living in a trailer home in the United States. Assuming both exist at or below the poverty levels established by their country, how are the families' lifestyles and economic situations similar and how are they different?

## Further Research

Nations Online refers to itself as “among other things, a more or less objective guide to the world, a statement for the peaceful, nonviolent coexistence of nations.” The website provides a variety of cultural, financial, historical, and ethnic information on countries and peoples throughout the world: [http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Nations\\_Online](http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Nations_Online).

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## **Glossary**

global stratification

a comparison of the wealth, economic stability, status, and power of countries as a whole



## Theoretical Perspectives on Social Stratification

- Understand and apply functionalist, conflict theory, and interactionist perspectives on social stratification

Basketball is one of the highest-paying professional sports. There is stratification even among teams. For example, the Minnesota Timberwolves hand out the lowest annual payroll, while the Los Angeles Lakers reportedly pay the highest. Kobe Bryant, a Lakers shooting guard, is one of the highest paid athletes in the NBA, earning around \$30.5 million a year (Forbes 2014). Even within specific fields, layers are stratified and members are ranked.

In sociology, even an issue such as NBA salaries can be seen from various points of view. Functionalists will examine the purpose of such high salaries, while conflict theorists will study the exorbitant salaries as an unfair distribution of money. Social stratification takes on new meanings when it is examined from different sociological perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

### Functionalism

In sociology, the functionalist perspective examines how society's parts operate. According to functionalism, different aspects of society exist because they serve a needed purpose. What is the function of social stratification?

In 1945, sociologists Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore published the **Davis-Moore thesis**, which argued that the greater the functional importance of a social role, the greater must be the reward. The theory posits that social stratification represents the inherently unequal value of different work. Certain tasks in society are more valuable than others. Qualified people who fill those positions must be rewarded more than others.

According to Davis and Moore, a firefighter's job is more important than, for instance, a grocery store cashier's. The cashier position does not require

the same skill and training level as firefighting. Without the incentive of higher pay and better benefits, why would someone be willing to rush into burning buildings? If pay levels were the same, the firefighter might as well work as a grocery store cashier. Davis and Moore believed that rewarding more important work with higher levels of income, prestige, and power encourages people to work harder and longer.

Davis and Moore stated that, in most cases, the degree of skill required for a job determines that job's importance. They also stated that the more skill required for a job, the fewer qualified people there would be to do that job. Certain jobs, such as cleaning hallways or answering phones, do not require much skill. The employees don't need a college degree. Other work, like designing a highway system or delivering a baby, requires immense skill.

In 1953, Melvin Tumin countered the Davis-Moore thesis in "Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis." Tumin questioned what determined a job's degree of importance. The Davis-Moore thesis does not explain, he argued, why a media personality with little education, skill, or talent becomes famous and rich on a reality show or a campaign trail. The thesis also does not explain inequalities in the education system or inequalities due to race or gender. Tumin believed social stratification prevented qualified people from attempting to fill roles (Tumin 1953). For example, an underprivileged youth has less chance of becoming a scientist, no matter how smart she is, because of the relative lack of opportunity available to her. The Davis-Moore thesis also does not explain why a basketball player earns millions of dollars a year when a doctor who saves lives, a soldier who fights for others' rights, and a teacher who helps form the minds of tomorrow will likely not make millions over the course of their careers.

The Davis-Moore thesis, though open for debate, was an early attempt to explain why stratification exists. The thesis states that social stratification is necessary to promote excellence, productivity, and efficiency, thus giving people something to strive for. Davis and Moore believed that the system serves society as a whole because it allows everyone to benefit to a certain extent.

## Conflict Theory



These people are protesting a decision made by Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee, to lay off custodians and outsource the jobs to a private firm to avoid paying employee benefits. Private job agencies often pay lower hourly wages. Is the decision fair? (Photo courtesy of Brian Stansberry/Wikimedia Commons)

Conflict theorists are deeply critical of social stratification, asserting that it benefits only some people, not all of society. For instance, to a conflict theorist, it seems wrong that a basketball player is paid millions for an annual contract while a public school teacher earns \$35,000 a year. Stratification, conflict theorists believe, perpetuates inequality. Conflict theorists try to bring awareness to inequalities, such as how a rich society can have so many poor members.

Many conflict theorists draw on the work of Karl Marx. During the nineteenth-century era of industrialization, Marx believed social stratification resulted from people's relationship to production. People were

divided by a single line: they either owned factories or worked in them. In Marx's time, bourgeois capitalists owned high-producing businesses, factories, and land, as they still do today. Proletariats were the workers who performed the manual labor to produce goods. Upper-class capitalists raked in profits and got rich, while working-class proletariats earned skimpy wages and struggled to survive. With such opposing interests, the two groups were divided by differences of wealth and power. Marx saw workers experience deep alienation, isolation and misery resulting from powerless status levels (Marx 1848). Marx argued that proletariats were oppressed by the money-hungry bourgeois.

Today, while working conditions have improved, conflict theorists believe that the strained working relationship between employers and employees still exists. Capitalists own the means of production, and a system is in place to make business owners rich and keep workers poor. According to conflict theorists, the resulting stratification creates class conflict. If he were alive in today's economy, as it recovers from a prolonged recession, Marx would likely have argued that the recession resulted from the greed of capitalists, satisfied at the expense of working people.

## **Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism is a theory that uses everyday interactions of individuals to explain society as a whole. Symbolic interactionism examines stratification from a micro-level perspective. This analysis strives to explain how people's social standing affects their everyday interactions.

In most communities, people interact primarily with others who share the same social standing. It is precisely because of social stratification that people tend to live, work, and associate with others like themselves, people who share their same income level, educational background, or racial background, and even tastes in food, music, and clothing. The built-in system of social stratification groups people together. This is one of the reasons why it was rare for a royal prince like England's Prince William to marry a commoner.

Symbolic interactionists also note that people's appearance reflects their perceived social standing. Housing, clothing, and transportation indicate social status, as do hairstyles, taste in accessories, and personal style.



- (a) A group of construction workers on the job site, and (b) a group of businessmen. What categories of stratification do these construction workers share? How do construction workers differ from executives or custodians? Who is more skilled? Who has greater prestige in society? (Photo (a) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of Chun Kit/flickr)

To symbolically communicate social standing, people often engage in **conspicuous consumption**, which is the purchase and use of certain products to make a social statement about status. Carrying pricey but eco-friendly water bottles could indicate a person's social standing. Some people buy expensive trendy sneakers even though they will never wear them to jog or play sports. A \$17,000 car provides transportation as easily as a \$100,000 vehicle, but the luxury car makes a social statement that the less expensive car can't live up to. All these symbols of stratification are worthy of examination by an interactionist.

## Summary

Social stratification can be examined from different sociological perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. The functionalist perspective states that systems exist in society for good reasons. Conflict theorists observe that stratification promotes inequality, such as between rich business owners and poor workers. Symbolic interactionists examine stratification from a micro-level perspective. They observe how social standing affects people's everyday interactions and how the concept of "social class" is constructed and maintained through everyday interactions.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

The basic premise of the Davis-Moore thesis is that the unequal distribution of rewards in social stratification:

- a. is an outdated mode of societal organization
- b. is an artificial reflection of society
- c. serves a purpose in society
- d. cannot be justified

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

C

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Unlike Davis and Moore, Melvin Tumin believed that, because of social stratification, some qualified people were \_\_\_\_\_ higher-level job positions.

- a. denied the opportunity to obtain
  - b. encouraged to train for
  - c. often fired from
  - d. forced into
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which statement represents stratification from the perspective of symbolic interactionism?

- a. Men often earn more than women, even working the same job.
  - b. After work, Pat, a janitor, feels more comfortable eating in a truck stop than a French restaurant.
  - c. Doctors earn more money because their job is more highly valued.
  - d. Teachers continue to struggle to keep benefits such as health insurance.
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

When Karl Marx said workers experience alienation, he meant that workers:

- a. must labor alone, without companionship

- b. do not feel connected to their work
- c. move from one geographical location to another
- d. have to put forth self-effort to get ahead

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Conflict theorists view capitalists as those who:

- a. are ambitious
- b. fund social services
- c. spend money wisely
- d. get rich while workers stay poor

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Analyze the Davis-Moore thesis. Do you agree with Davis and Moore? Does social stratification play an important function in society? What examples can you think of that support the thesis? What examples can you think of that refute the thesis?

**Exercise:**



## **Problem:**

Consider social stratification from the symbolic interactionist perspective. How does social stratification influence the daily interactions of individuals? How do systems of class, based on factors such as prestige, power, income, and wealth, influence your own daily routines, as well as your beliefs and attitudes? Illustrate your ideas with specific examples and anecdotes from your own life and the lives of people in your community.

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## **Glossary**

conspicuous consumption

the act of buying and using products to make a statement about social standing

Davis-Moore thesis

a thesis that argues some social stratification is a social necessity

## Introduction to Sociological Research

class="introduction"

Many  
believe  
that crime  
rates go up  
during the  
full moon,  
but  
scientific  
research  
does not  
support  
this  
conclusion  
. (Photo  
courtesy of  
Jubula  
2/flickr)



Have you ever wondered if home schooling affects a person's later success in college or how many people wait until they are in their forties to get married? Do you wonder if texting is changing teenagers' abilities to spell correctly or to communicate clearly? How do social movements like Occupy Wall Street develop? How about the development of social phenomena like the massive public followings for Star Trek and Harry Potter? The goal of research is to answer questions. Sociological research attempts to answer a vast variety of questions, such as these and more, about our social world.

We often have opinions about social situations, but these may be biased by our expectations or based on limited data. Instead, scientific research is based on **empirical evidence**, which is evidence that comes from direct experience, scientifically gathered data, or experimentation. Many people believe, for example, that crime rates go up when there's a full moon, but research doesn't support this opinion. Researchers Rotton and Kelly (1985) conducted a **meta-analysis** of research on the full moon's effects on

behavior. Meta-analysis is a technique in which the results of virtually all previous studies on a specific subject are evaluated together. Rotton and Kelly's meta-analysis included thirty-seven prior studies on the effects of the full moon on crime rates, and the overall findings were that full moons are entirely unrelated to crime, suicide, psychiatric problems, and crisis center calls (cited in Arkowitz and Lilienfeld 2009). We may each know of an instance in which a crime happened during a full moon, but it was likely just a coincidence.

People commonly try to understand the happenings in their world by finding or creating an explanation for an occurrence. Social scientists may develop a **hypothesis** for the same reason. A hypothesis is a testable educated guess about predicted outcomes between two or more variables; it's a possible explanation for specific happenings in the social world and allows for testing to determine whether the explanation holds true in many instances, as well as among various groups or in different places. Sociologists use empirical data and the **scientific method**, or an interpretative framework, to increase understanding of societies and social interactions, but research begins with the search for an answer to a question.

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Rotton, James, and Ivan W. Kelly. 1985. "Much Ado about the Full Moon: A Meta-analysis of Lunar-Lunacy Research." *Psychological Bulletin* 97 (no. 2): 286–306.

## Glossary

empirical evidence

evidence that comes from direct experience, scientifically gathered data, or experimentation

meta-analysis

a technique in which the results of virtually all previous studies on a specific subject are evaluated together

## Approaches to Sociological Research

- Define and describe the scientific method
- Explain how the scientific method is used in sociological research
- Understand the function and importance of an interpretive framework
- Define what reliability and validity mean in a research study

When sociologists apply the sociological perspective and begin to ask questions, no topic is off limits. Every aspect of human behavior is a source of possible investigation. Sociologists question the world that humans have created and live in. They notice patterns of behavior as people move through that world. Using sociological methods and systematic research within the framework of the scientific method and a scholarly interpretive perspective, sociologists have discovered workplace patterns that have transformed industries, family patterns that have enlightened family members, and education patterns that have aided structural changes in classrooms.

The crime during a full moon discussion put forth a few loosely stated opinions. If the human behaviors around those claims were tested systematically, a police officer, for example, could write a report and offer the findings to sociologists and the world in general. The new perspective could help people understand themselves and their neighbors and help people make better decisions about their lives. It might seem strange to use scientific practices to study social trends, but, as we shall see, it's extremely helpful to rely on systematic approaches that research methods provide.

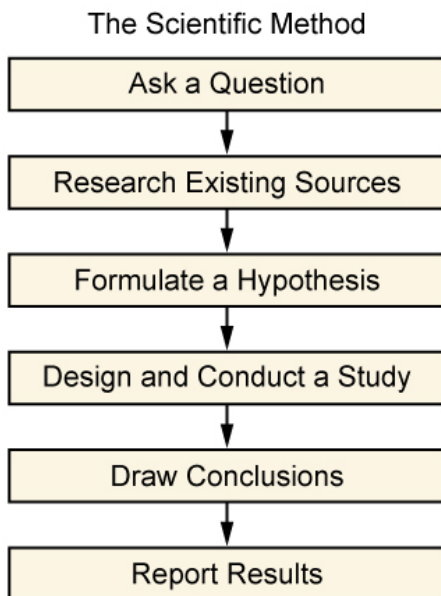
Sociologists often begin the research process by asking a question about how or why things happen in this world. It might be a unique question about a new trend or an old question about a common aspect of life. Once the sociologist forms the question, he or she proceeds through an in-depth process to answer it. In deciding how to design that process, the researcher may adopt a scientific approach or an interpretive framework. The following sections describe these approaches to knowledge.

## The Scientific Method

Sociologists make use of tried and true methods of research, such as experiments, surveys, and field research. But humans and their social interactions are so diverse that these interactions can seem impossible to chart or explain. It might seem that science is about discoveries and chemical reactions or about proving ideas right or wrong rather than about exploring the nuances of human behavior.

However, this is exactly why scientific models work for studying human behavior. A scientific process of research establishes parameters that help make sure results are objective and accurate. Scientific methods provide limitations and boundaries that focus a study and organize its results.

The scientific method involves developing and testing theories about the world based on empirical evidence. It is defined by its commitment to systematic observation of the empirical world and strives to be objective, critical, skeptical, and logical. It involves a series of prescribed steps that have been established over centuries of scholarship.



The scientific method  
is an essential tool in  
research.

But just because sociological studies use scientific methods does not make the results less human. Sociological topics are not reduced to right or wrong facts. In this field, results of studies tend to provide people with access to knowledge they did not have before—knowledge of other cultures, knowledge of rituals and beliefs, or knowledge of trends and attitudes. No matter what research approach they use, researchers want to maximize the study's **reliability**, which refers to how likely research results are to be replicated if the study is reproduced. Reliability increases the likelihood that what happens to one person will happen to all people in a group. Researchers also strive for **validity**, which refers to how well the study measures what it was designed to measure. Returning to the crime rate during a full moon topic, reliability of a study would reflect how well the resulting experience represents the average adult crime rate during a full moon. Validity would ensure that the study's design accurately examined what it was designed to study, so an exploration of adult criminal behaviors during a full moon should address that issue and not veer into other age groups' crimes, for example.

In general, sociologists tackle questions about the role of social characteristics in outcomes. For example, how do different communities fare in terms of psychological well-being, community cohesiveness, range of vocation, wealth, crime rates, and so on? Are communities functioning smoothly? Sociologists look between the cracks to discover obstacles to meeting basic human needs. They might study environmental influences and patterns of behavior that lead to crime, substance abuse, divorce, poverty, unplanned pregnancies, or illness. And, because sociological studies are not all focused on negative behaviors or challenging situations, researchers might study vacation trends, healthy eating habits, neighborhood organizations, higher education patterns, games, parks, and exercise habits.

Sociologists can use the scientific method not only to collect but also to interpret and analyze the data. They deliberately apply scientific logic and objectivity. They are interested in—but not attached to—the results. They work outside of their own political or social agendas. This doesn't mean



researchers do not have their own personalities, complete with preferences and opinions. But sociologists deliberately use the scientific method to maintain as much objectivity, focus, and consistency as possible in a particular study.

With its systematic approach, the scientific method has proven useful in shaping sociological studies. The scientific method provides a systematic, organized series of steps that help ensure objectivity and consistency in exploring a social problem. They provide the means for accuracy, reliability, and validity. In the end, the scientific method provides a shared basis for discussion and analysis (Merton 1963).

Typically, the scientific method starts with these steps—1) ask a question, 2) research existing sources, 3) formulate a hypothesis—described below.

## Ask a Question

The first step of the scientific method is to ask a question, describe a problem, and identify the specific area of interest. The topic should be narrow enough to study within a geography and time frame. “Are societies capable of sustained happiness?” would be too vague. The question should also be broad enough to have universal merit. “What do personal hygiene habits reveal about the values of students at XYZ High School?” would be too narrow. That said, happiness and hygiene are worthy topics to study. Sociologists do not rule out any topic, but would strive to frame these questions in better research terms.

That is why sociologists are careful to define their terms. In a hygiene study, for instance, hygiene could be defined as “personal habits to maintain physical appearance (as opposed to health),” and a researcher might ask, “How do differing personal hygiene habits reflect the cultural value placed on appearance?” When forming these basic research questions, sociologists develop an **operational definition**, that is, they define the concept in terms of the physical or concrete steps it takes to objectively measure it. The operational definition identifies an observable condition of the concept. By

operationalizing a variable of the concept, all researchers can collect data in a systematic or replicable manner.

The operational definition must be valid, appropriate, and meaningful. And it must be reliable, meaning that results will be close to uniform when tested on more than one person. For example, “good drivers” might be defined in many ways: those who use their turn signals, those who don’t speed, or those who courteously allow others to merge. But these driving behaviors could be interpreted differently by different researchers and could be difficult to measure. Alternatively, “a driver who has never received a traffic violation” is a specific description that will lead researchers to obtain the same information, so it is an effective operational definition.

## **Research Existing Sources**

The next step researchers undertake is to conduct background research through a **literature review**, which is a review of any existing similar or related studies. A visit to the library and a thorough online search will uncover existing research about the topic of study. This step helps researchers gain a broad understanding of work previously conducted on the topic at hand and enables them to position their own research to build on prior knowledge. Researchers—including student researchers—are responsible for correctly citing existing sources they use in a study or that inform their work. While it is fine to borrow previously published material (as long as it enhances a unique viewpoint), it must be referenced properly and never plagiarized.

To study hygiene and its value in a particular society, a researcher might sort through existing research and unearth studies about child-rearing, vanity, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, and cultural attitudes toward beauty. It’s important to sift through this information and determine what is relevant. Using existing sources educates researchers and helps refine and improve studies’ designs.

## Formulate a Hypothesis

A **hypothesis** is an assumption about how two or more variables are related; it makes a conjectural statement about the relationship between those variables. In sociology, the hypothesis will often predict how one form of human behavior influences another. In research, **independent variables** are the *cause* of the change. The **dependent variable** is the *effect*, or thing that is changed.

For example, in a basic study, the researcher would establish one form of human behavior as the independent variable and observe the influence it has on a dependent variable. How does gender (the independent variable) affect rate of income (the dependent variable)? How does one’s religion (the independent variable) affect family size (the dependent variable)? How is social class (the dependent variable) affected by level of education (the independent variable)?

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
The greater the availability of affordable housing, the lower the homeless rate.	Affordable Housing	Homeless Rate
The greater the availability of math tutoring, the higher the math grades.	Math Tutoring	Math Grades
The greater the police patrol presence, the safer the neighborhood.	Police Patrol Presence	Safer Neighborhood

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Dependent Variable</b>
The greater the factory lighting, the higher the productivity.	Factory Lighting	Productivity
The greater the amount of observation, the higher the public awareness.	Observation	Public Awareness

Examples of Dependent and Independent Variables Typically, the independent variable causes the dependent variable to change in some way.

At this point, a researcher's operational definitions help measure the variables. In a study asking how tutoring improves grades, for instance, one researcher might define a "good" grade as a C or better, while another uses a B+ as a starting point for "good." Another operational definition might describe "tutoring" as "one-on-one assistance by an expert in the field, hired by an educational institution." Those definitions set limits and establish cut-off points that ensure consistency and replicability in a study.

As the table shows, an independent variable is the one that causes a dependent variable to change. For example, a researcher might hypothesize that teaching children proper hygiene (the independent variable) will boost their sense of self-esteem (the dependent variable). Or rephrased, a child's sense of self-esteem depends, in part, on the quality and availability of hygienic resources.

Of course, this hypothesis can also work the other way around. Perhaps a sociologist believes that increasing a child's sense of self-esteem (the independent variable) will automatically increase or improve habits of hygiene (now the dependent variable). Identifying the independent and dependent variables is very important. As the hygiene example shows, simply identifying two topics, or variables, is not enough; their prospective relationship must be part of the hypothesis.

Just because a sociologist forms an educated prediction of a study's outcome doesn't mean data contradicting the hypothesis aren't welcome. Sociologists analyze general patterns in response to a study, but they are equally interested in exceptions to patterns. In a study of education, a researcher might predict that high school dropouts have a hard time finding rewarding careers. While it has become at least a cultural assumption that the higher the education, the higher the salary and degree of career happiness, there are certainly exceptions. People with little education have had stunning careers, and people with advanced degrees have had trouble finding work. A sociologist prepares a hypothesis knowing that results will vary.

Once the preliminary work is done, it's time for the next research steps: designing and conducting a study and drawing conclusions. These research methods are discussed below.

## **Interpretive Framework**

While many sociologists rely on the scientific method as a research approach, others operate from an **interpretive framework**. While systematic, this approach doesn't follow the hypothesis-testing model that seeks to find generalizable results. Instead, an *interpretive framework*, sometimes referred to as an interpretive perspective, seeks to understand social worlds from the point of view of participants, which leads to in-depth knowledge.

Interpretive research is generally more descriptive or narrative in its findings. Rather than formulating a hypothesis and method for testing it, an interpretive researcher will develop approaches to explore the topic at hand that may involve a significant amount of direct observation or interaction with subjects. This type of researcher also learns as he or she proceeds and sometimes adjusts the research methods or processes midway to optimize findings as they evolve.

## **Summary**

Using the scientific method, a researcher conducts a study in five phases: asking a question, researching existing sources, formulating a hypothesis, conducting a study, and drawing conclusions. The scientific method is useful in that it provides a clear method of organizing a study. Some sociologists conduct research through an interpretive framework rather than employing the scientific method.

Scientific sociological studies often observe relationships between variables. Researchers study how one variable changes another. Prior to conducting a study, researchers are careful to apply operational definitions to their terms and to establish dependent and independent variables.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

A measurement is considered \_\_\_\_\_ if it actually measures what it is intended to measure, according to the topic of the study.

- a. reliable
- b. sociological
- c. valid
- d. quantitative

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

C

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Sociological studies test relationships in which change in one \_\_\_\_\_ causes change in another.

- a. test subject
  - b. behavior
  - c. variable
  - d. operational definition
- 

**Solution:**  
**Answers**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

In a study, a group of ten-year-old boys are fed doughnuts every morning for a week and then weighed to see how much weight they gained. Which factor is the dependent variable?

- a. The doughnuts
  - b. The boys
  - c. The duration of a week
  - d. The weight gained
- 

**Solution:**  
**Answers**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which statement provides the best operational definition of “childhood obesity”?

- a. Children who eat unhealthy foods and spend too much time watching television and playing video games

- b. A distressing trend that can lead to health issues including type 2 diabetes and heart disease
  - c. Body weight at least 20 percent higher than a healthy weight for a child of that height
  - d. The tendency of children today to weigh more than children of earlier generations
- 

**Solution:**

**Answers**

C

## Short Answer

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Write down the first three steps of the scientific method. Think of a broad topic that you are interested in and which would make a good sociological study—for example, ethnic diversity in a college, homecoming rituals, athletic scholarships, or teen driving. Now, take that topic through the first steps of the process. For each step, write a few sentences or a paragraph: 1) Ask a question about the topic. 2) Do some research and write down the titles of some articles or books you'd want to read about the topic. 3) Formulate a hypothesis.

## Further Research

For a historical perspective on the scientific method in sociology, read “The Elements of Scientific Method in Sociology” by F. Stuart Chapin (1914) in the *American Journal of Sociology*: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Method-in-Sociology>

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## **Glossary**

dependent variables

a variable changed by other variables

hypothesis

a testable educated guess about predicted outcomes between two or more variables

independent variables

variables that cause changes in dependent variables

interpretive framework

a sociological research approach that seeks in-depth understanding of a topic or subject through observation or interaction; this approach is not based on hypothesis testing

literature review

a scholarly research step that entails identifying and studying all existing studies on a topic to create a basis for new research

operational definitions

specific explanations of abstract concepts that a researcher plans to study

reliability

a measure of a study's consistency that considers how likely results are to be replicated if a study is reproduced

scientific method

an established scholarly research method that involves asking a question, researching existing sources, forming a hypothesis, designing and conducting a study, and drawing conclusions

validity

the degree to which a sociological measure accurately reflects the topic of study

## Research Methods

- Differentiate between four kinds of research methods: surveys, field research, experiments, and secondary data analysis
- Understand why different topics are better suited to different research approaches

Sociologists examine the world, see a problem or interesting pattern, and set out to study it. They use research methods to design a study—perhaps a detailed, systematic, scientific method for conducting research and obtaining data, or perhaps an ethnographic study utilizing an interpretive framework. Planning the research design is a key step in any sociological study.

When entering a particular social environment, a researcher must be careful. There are times to remain anonymous and times to be overt. There are times to conduct interviews and times to simply observe. Some participants need to be thoroughly informed; others should not know they are being observed. A researcher wouldn't stroll into a crime-ridden neighborhood at midnight, calling out, "Any gang members around?" And if a researcher walked into a coffee shop and told the employees they would be observed as part of a study on work efficiency, the self-conscious, intimidated baristas might not behave naturally. This is called the **Hawthorne effect**—where people change their behavior because they know they are being watched as part of a study. The Hawthorne effect is unavoidable in some research. In many cases, sociologists have to make the purpose of the study known. Subjects must be aware that they are being observed, and a certain amount of artificiality may result (Sonnenfeld 1985).

Making sociologists' presence invisible is not always realistic for other reasons. That option is not available to a researcher studying prison behaviors, early education, or the Ku Klux Klan. Researchers can't just stroll into prisons, kindergarten classrooms, or Klan meetings and unobtrusively observe behaviors. In situations like these, other methods are needed. All studies shape the research design, while research design simultaneously shapes the study. Researchers choose methods that best suit their study topics and that fit with their overall approaches to research.

In planning studies' designs, sociologists generally choose from four widely used methods of social investigation: survey, field research, experiment, and **secondary data analysis**, or use of existing sources. Every research method comes with plusses and minuses, and the topic of study strongly influences which method or methods are put to use.

## Surveys

As a research method, a **survey** collects data from subjects who respond to a series of questions about behaviors and opinions, often in the form of a questionnaire. The survey is one of the most widely used scientific research methods. The standard survey format allows individuals a level of anonymity in which they can express personal ideas.



Questionnaires are a common research method; the U.S. Census is a well-known example. (Photo courtesy of Kathryn Decker/flickr)

At some point, most people in the United States respond to some type of survey. The U.S. Census is an excellent example of a large-scale survey intended to gather sociological data. Not all surveys are considered sociological research, however, and many surveys people commonly encounter focus on identifying marketing needs and strategies rather than testing a hypothesis or contributing to social science knowledge. Questions such as, "How many hot dogs do you eat in a month?" or "Were the staff helpful?" are not usually designed as scientific research. Often, polls on television do not reflect a general population, but are merely answers from a specific show's audience. Polls conducted by programs such as *American Idol* or *So You Think You Can Dance* represent the opinions of fans but are not particularly scientific. A good contrast to these are the Nielsen Ratings, which determine the popularity of television programming through scientific market research.



American Idol uses a real-time survey system—with numbers—that allows members in the audience to vote on contestants.

(Photo courtesy of Sam Howzit/flickr)

Sociologists conduct surveys under controlled conditions for specific purposes. Surveys gather different types of information from people. While surveys are not great at capturing the ways people really behave in social situations, they are a great method for discovering how people feel and think—or at least how they say they feel and think. Surveys can track preferences for presidential candidates or reported individual behaviors (such as sleeping, driving, or texting habits) or factual information such as employment status, income, and education levels.

A survey targets a specific **population**, people who are the focus of a study, such as college athletes, international students, or teenagers living with type 1 (juvenile-onset) diabetes. Most researchers choose to survey a small sector of the population, or a **sample**: that is, a manageable number of subjects who *represent* a larger population. The success of a study depends on how well a population is represented by the sample. In a **random sample**, every person in a population has the same chance of being chosen for the study. According to the laws of probability, random samples represent the population as a whole. For instance, a Gallup Poll, if conducted as a nationwide random sampling, should be able to provide an accurate estimate of public opinion whether it contacts 2,000 or 10,000 people.

After selecting subjects, the researcher develops a specific plan to ask questions and record responses. It is important to inform subjects of the nature and purpose of the study up front. If they agree to participate, researchers thank subjects and offer them a chance to see the results of the study if they are interested. The researcher presents the

subjects with an instrument, which is a means of gathering the information. A common instrument is a questionnaire, in which subjects answer a series of questions. For some topics, the researcher might ask yes-or-no or multiple-choice questions, allowing subjects to choose possible responses to each question. This kind of **quantitative data**—research collected in numerical form that can be counted—are easy to tabulate. Just count up the number of “yes” and “no” responses or correct answers, and chart them into percentages.

Questionnaires can also ask more complex questions with more complex answers—beyond “yes,” “no,” or the option next to a checkbox. In those cases, the answers are subjective and vary from person to person. *How do plan to use your college education? Why do you follow Jimmy Buffett around the country and attend every concert?* Those types of questions require short essay responses, and participants willing to take the time to write those answers will convey personal information about religious beliefs, political views, and morals. Some topics that reflect internal thought are impossible to observe directly and are difficult to discuss honestly in a public forum. People are more likely to share honest answers if they can respond to questions anonymously. This type of information is **qualitative data**—results that are subjective and often based on what is seen in a natural setting. Qualitative information is harder to organize and tabulate. The researcher will end up with a wide range of responses, some of which may be surprising. The benefit of written opinions, though, is the wealth of material that they provide.

An **interview** is a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the subject, and it is a way of conducting surveys on a topic. Interviews are similar to the short-answer questions on surveys in that the researcher asks subjects a series of questions. However, participants are free to respond as they wish, without being limited by predetermined choices. In the back-and-forth conversation of an interview, a researcher can ask for clarification, spend more time on a subtopic, or ask additional questions. In an interview, a subject will ideally feel free to open up and answer questions that are often complex. There are no right or wrong answers. The subject might not even know how to answer the questions honestly.

Questions such as, “How did society's view of alcohol consumption influence your decision whether or not to take your first sip of alcohol?” or “Did you feel that the divorce of your parents would put a social stigma on your family?” involve so many factors that the answers are difficult to categorize. A researcher needs to avoid steering or prompting the subject to respond in a specific way; otherwise, the results will prove to be unreliable. And, obviously, a sociological interview is not an interrogation. The researcher will benefit from gaining a subject’s trust, from empathizing or commiserating with a subject, and from listening without judgment.

## Field Research

The work of sociology rarely happens in limited, confined spaces. Sociologists seldom study subjects in their own offices or laboratories. Rather, sociologists go out into the world. They meet subjects where they live, work, and play. **Field research** refers to gathering **primary data** from a natural environment without doing a lab experiment or a survey. It is a research method suited to an interpretive framework rather than to the scientific method. To conduct field research, the sociologist must be willing to step into new environments and observe, participate, or experience those worlds. In field work, the sociologists, rather than the subjects, are the ones out of their element.

The researcher interacts with or observes a person or people and gathers data along the way. The key point in field research is that it takes place in the subject's natural environment, whether it's a coffee shop or tribal village, a homeless shelter or the DMV, a hospital, airport, mall, or beach resort.



Photo Courtesy of Olympic National Park

Sociological researchers travel across countries and cultures to interact with and observe subjects in their natural environments. (Photo courtesy of IMLS Digital Collections and

Content/flickr and  
Olympic National Park)

While field research often begins in a specific *setting*, the study's purpose is to observe specific *behaviors* in that setting. Field work is optimal for observing *how* people behave. It is less useful, however, for understanding *why* they behave that way. You can't really narrow down cause and effect when there are so many variables floating around in a natural environment.

Much of the data gathered in field research are based not on cause and effect but on **correlation**. And while field research looks for correlation, its small sample size does not allow for establishing a causal relationship between two variables.

**Note:**

**Parrotheads as Sociological Subjects**



Business suits for the day job are replaced by leis and T-shirts for a Jimmy Buffett concert. (Photo courtesy of Sam Howzitt/flickr)

Some sociologists study small groups of people who share an identity in one aspect of their lives. Almost everyone belongs to a group of like-minded people who share an interest or hobby. Scientologists, folk dancers, or members of Mensa (an organization for people with exceptionally high IQs) express a specific part of their identity through their affiliation with a group. Those groups are often of great interest to sociologists. Jimmy Buffett, an American musician who built a career from his single top-10 song "Margaritaville," has a following of devoted groupies called Parrotheads. Some of



them have taken fandom to the extreme, making Parrothead culture a lifestyle. In 2005, Parrotheads and their subculture caught the attention of researchers John Mihelich and John Papineau. The two saw the way Jimmy Buffett fans collectively created an artificial reality. They wanted to know how fan groups shape culture. What Mihelich and Papineau found was that Parrotheads, for the most part, do not seek to challenge or even change society, as many sub-groups do. In fact, most Parrotheads live successfully within society, holding upper-level jobs in the corporate world. What they seek is escape from the stress of daily life.

At Jimmy Buffett concerts, Parrotheads engage in a form of role play. They paint their faces and dress for the tropics in grass skirts, Hawaiian leis, and Parrot hats. These fans don't generally play the part of Parrotheads outside of these concerts; you are not likely to see a lone Parrothead in a bank or library. In that sense, Parrothead culture is less about individualism and more about conformity. Being a Parrothead means sharing a specific identity. Parrotheads feel connected to each other: it's a group identity, not an individual one.

In their study, Mihelich and Papineau quote from a recent book by sociologist Richard Butsch, who writes, "un-self-conscious acts, if done by many people together, can produce change, even though the change may be unintended" (2000). Many Parrothead fan groups have performed good works in the name of Jimmy Buffett culture, donating to charities and volunteering their services.

However, the authors suggest that what really drives Parrothead culture is commercialism. Jimmy Buffett's popularity was dying out in the 1980s until being reinvigorated after he signed a sponsorship deal with a beer company. These days, his concert tours alone generate nearly \$30 million a year. Buffett made a lucrative career for himself by partnering with product companies and marketing Margaritaville in the form of T-shirts, restaurants, casinos, and an expansive line of products. Some fans accuse Buffett of selling out, while others admire his financial success. Buffett makes no secret of his commercial exploitations; from the stage, he's been known to tell his fans, "Just remember, I am spending your money foolishly."

Mihelich and Papineau gathered much of their information online. Referring to their study as a "Web ethnography," they collected extensive narrative material from fans who joined Parrothead clubs and posted their experiences on websites. "We do not claim to have conducted a complete ethnography of Parrothead fans, or even of the Parrothead Web activity," state the authors, "but we focused on particular aspects of Parrothead practice as revealed through Web research" (2005). Fan narratives gave them insight into how individuals identify with Buffett's world and how fans used popular music to cultivate personal and collective meaning.

In conducting studies about pockets of culture, most sociologists seek to discover a universal appeal. Mihelich and Papineau stated, "Although Parrotheads are a relative minority of the contemporary US population, an in-depth look at their practice and conditions illuminate [sic] cultural practices and conditions many of us experience and participate in" (2005).

Here, we will look at three types of field research: participant observation, ethnography, and the case study.

## **Participant Observation**

In 2000, a comic writer named Rodney Rothman wanted an insider's view of white-collar work. He slipped into the sterile, high-rise offices of a New York "dot com" agency. Every day for two weeks, he pretended to work there. His main purpose was simply to see whether anyone would notice him or challenge his presence. No one did. The receptionist greeted him. The employees smiled and said good morning. Rothman was accepted as part of the team. He even went so far as to claim a desk, inform the receptionist of his whereabouts, and attend a meeting. He published an article about his experience in *The New Yorker* called "My Fake Job" (2000). Later, he was discredited for allegedly fabricating some details of the story and *The New Yorker* issued an apology. However, Rothman's entertaining article still offered fascinating descriptions of the inside workings of a "dot com" company and exemplified the lengths to which a sociologist will go to uncover material.

Rothman had conducted a form of study called **participant observation**, in which researchers join people and participate in a group's routine activities for the purpose of observing them within that context. This method lets researchers experience a specific aspect of social life. A researcher might go to great lengths to get a firsthand look into a trend, institution, or behavior. Researchers temporarily put themselves into roles and record their observations. A researcher might work as a waitress in a diner, live as a homeless person for several weeks, or ride along with police officers as they patrol their regular beat. Often, these researchers try to blend in seamlessly with the population they study, and they may not disclose their true identity or purpose if they feel it would compromise the results of their research.



Is she a working waitress or a sociologist conducting a study using participant observation? (Photo courtesy of zoetnet/flickr)

At the beginning of a field study, researchers might have a question: “What really goes on in the kitchen of the most popular diner on campus?” or “What is it like to be homeless?” Participant observation is a useful method if the researcher wants to explore a certain environment from the inside.

Field researchers simply want to observe and learn. In such a setting, the researcher will be alert and open minded to whatever happens, recording all observations accurately. Soon, as patterns emerge, questions will become more specific, observations will lead to hypotheses, and hypotheses will guide the researcher in shaping data into results.

In a study of small towns in the United States conducted by sociological researchers John S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, the team altered their purpose as they gathered data. They initially planned to focus their study on the role of religion in U.S. towns. As they gathered observations, they realized that the effect of industrialization and urbanization was the more relevant topic of this social group. The Lynds did not change their methods, but they revised their purpose. This shaped the structure of *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture*, their published results (Lynd and Lynd 1959).

The Lynds were upfront about their mission. The townspeople of Muncie, Indiana, knew why the researchers were in their midst. But some sociologists prefer not to alert people to their presence. The main advantage of covert participant observation is that it allows the researcher access to authentic, natural behaviors of a group’s members. The challenge, however, is gaining access to a setting without disrupting the pattern of

others' behavior. Becoming an inside member of a group, organization, or subculture takes time and effort. Researchers must pretend to be something they are not. The process could involve role playing, making contacts, networking, or applying for a job.

Once inside a group, some researchers spend months or even years pretending to be one of the people they are observing. However, as observers, they cannot get too involved. They must keep their purpose in mind and apply the sociological perspective. That way, they illuminate social patterns that are often unrecognized. Because information gathered during participant observation is mostly qualitative, rather than quantitative, the end results are often descriptive or interpretive. The researcher might present findings in an article or book and describe what he or she witnessed and experienced.

This type of research is what journalist Barbara Ehrenreich conducted for her book *Nickel and Dimed*. One day over lunch with her editor, as the story goes, Ehrenreich mentioned an idea. *How can people exist on minimum-wage work? How do low-income workers get by?* she wondered. *Someone should do a study.* To her surprise, her editor responded, *Why don't you do it?*

That's how Ehrenreich found herself joining the ranks of the working class. For several months, she left her comfortable home and lived and worked among people who lacked, for the most part, higher education and marketable job skills. Undercover, she applied for and worked minimum wage jobs as a waitress, a cleaning woman, a nursing home aide, and a retail chain employee. During her participant observation, she used only her income from those jobs to pay for food, clothing, transportation, and shelter.

She discovered the obvious, that it's almost impossible to get by on minimum wage work. She also experienced and observed attitudes many middle and upper-class people never think about. She witnessed firsthand the treatment of working class employees. She saw the extreme measures people take to make ends meet and to survive. She described fellow employees who held two or three jobs, worked seven days a week, lived in cars, could not pay to treat chronic health conditions, got randomly fired, submitted to drug tests, and moved in and out of homeless shelters. She brought aspects of that life to light, describing difficult working conditions and the poor treatment that low-wage workers suffer.

*Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, the book she wrote upon her return to her real life as a well-paid writer, has been widely read and used in many college classrooms.



Field research happens in real locations. What type of environment do work spaces foster? What would a sociologist discover after blending in? (Photo courtesy of drewzhrodague/flickr)

## **Ethnography**

**Ethnography** is the extended observation of the social perspective and cultural values of an entire social setting. Ethnographies involve objective observation of an entire community.

The heart of an ethnographic study focuses on how subjects view their own social standing and how they understand themselves in relation to a community. An ethnographic study might observe, for example, a small U.S. fishing town, an Inuit community, a village in Thailand, a Buddhist monastery, a private boarding school, or an amusement park. These places all have borders. People live, work, study, or vacation within those borders. People are there for a certain reason and therefore behave in certain ways and respect certain cultural norms. An ethnographer would commit to spending a determined amount of time studying every aspect of the chosen place, taking in as much as possible.

A sociologist studying a tribe in the Amazon might watch the way villagers go about their daily lives and then write a paper about it. To observe a spiritual retreat center, an ethnographer might sign up for a retreat and attend as a guest for an extended stay, observe and record data, and collate the material into results.

## Institutional Ethnography

Institutional ethnography is an extension of basic ethnographic research principles that focuses intentionally on everyday concrete social relationships. Developed by Canadian sociologist Dorothy E. Smith, institutional ethnography is often considered a feminist-inspired approach to social analysis and primarily considers women's experiences within male-dominated societies and power structures. Smith's work is seen to challenge sociology's exclusion of women, both academically and in the study of women's lives (Fenstermaker, n.d.).

Historically, social science research tended to objectify women and ignore their experiences except as viewed from the male perspective. Modern feminists note that describing women, and other marginalized groups, as subordinates helps those in authority maintain their own dominant positions (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, n.d.). Smith's three major works explored what she called "the conceptual practices of power" (1990; cited in Fenstermaker, n.d.) and are still considered seminal works in feminist theory and ethnography.

### Note:

#### The Making of *Middletown: A Study in Modern U.S. Culture*

In 1924, a young married couple named Robert and Helen Lynd undertook an unprecedented ethnography: to apply sociological methods to the study of one U.S. city in order to discover what "ordinary" people in the United States did and believed. Choosing Muncie, Indiana (population about 30,000), as their subject, they moved to the small town and lived there for eighteen months.

Ethnographers had been examining other cultures for decades—groups considered minority or outsider—like gangs, immigrants, and the poor. But no one had studied the so-called average American.

Recording interviews and using surveys to gather data, the Lynds did not sugarcoat or idealize U.S. life (PBS). They objectively stated what they observed. Researching existing sources, they compared Muncie in 1890 to the Muncie they observed in 1924. Most Muncie adults, they found, had grown up on farms but now lived in homes inside the city. From that discovery, the Lynds focused their study on the impact of industrialization and urbanization.

They observed that Muncie was divided into business class and working class groups. They defined *business class* as dealing with abstract concepts and symbols, while *working class* people used tools to create concrete objects. The two classes led different lives with different goals and hopes. However, the Lynds observed, mass production offered both classes the same amenities. Like wealthy families, the working class was now able to own radios, cars, washing machines, telephones,

vacuum cleaners, and refrigerators. This was an emerging material new reality of the 1920s.

As the Lynds worked, they divided their manuscript into six sections: Getting a Living, Making a Home, Training the Young, Using Leisure, Engaging in Religious Practices, and Engaging in Community Activities. Each chapter included subsections such as “The Long Arm of the Job” and “Why Do They Work So Hard?” in the “Getting a Living” chapter.

When the study was completed, the Lynds encountered a big problem. The Rockefeller Foundation, which had commissioned the book, claimed it was useless and refused to publish it. The Lynds asked if they could seek a publisher themselves.

*Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* was not only published in 1929 but also became an instant bestseller, a status unheard of for a sociological study. The book sold out six printings in its first year of publication, and has never gone out of print (PBS).

Nothing like it had ever been done before. *Middletown* was reviewed on the front page of the *New York Times*. Readers in the 1920s and 1930s identified with the citizens of Muncie, Indiana, but they were equally fascinated by the sociological methods and the use of scientific data to define ordinary people in the United States. The book was proof that social data was important—and interesting—to the U.S. public.



A classroom in Muncie, Indiana, in 1917, five years before John and Helen Lynd began researching this “typical” U.S. community. (Photo courtesy of Don O’Brien/flickr)

## Case Study

Sometimes a researcher wants to study one specific person or event. A **case study** is an in-depth analysis of a single event, situation, or individual. To conduct a case study, a

researcher examines existing sources like documents and archival records, conducts interviews, engages in direct observation and even participant observation, if possible.

Researchers might use this method to study a single case of, for example, a foster child, drug lord, cancer patient, criminal, or rape victim. However, a major criticism of the case study as a method is that a developed study of a single case, while offering depth on a topic, does not provide enough evidence to form a generalized conclusion. In other words, it is difficult to make universal claims based on just one person, since one person does not verify a pattern. This is why most sociologists do not use case studies as a primary research method.

However, case studies are useful when the single case is unique. In these instances, a single case study can add tremendous knowledge to a certain discipline. For example, a feral child, also called “wild child,” is one who grows up isolated from human beings. Feral children grow up without social contact and language, which are elements crucial to a “civilized” child’s development. These children mimic the behaviors and movements of animals, and often invent their own language. There are only about one hundred cases of “feral children” in the world.

As you may imagine, a feral child is a subject of great interest to researchers. Feral children provide unique information about child development because they have grown up outside of the parameters of “normal” child development. And since there are very few feral children, the case study is the most appropriate method for researchers to use in studying the subject.

At age three, a Ukrainian girl named Oxana Malaya suffered severe parental neglect. She lived in a shed with dogs, and she ate raw meat and scraps. Five years later, a neighbor called authorities and reported seeing a girl who ran on all fours, barking. Officials brought Oxana into society, where she was cared for and taught some human behaviors, but she never became fully socialized. She has been designated as unable to support herself and now lives in a mental institution (Grice 2011). Case studies like this offer a way for sociologists to collect data that may not be collectable by any other method.

## Experiments

You’ve probably tested personal social theories. “If I study at night and review in the morning, I’ll improve my retention skills.” Or, “If I stop drinking soda, I’ll feel better.” Cause and effect. If this, then that. When you test the theory, your results either prove or disprove your hypothesis.

One way researchers test social theories is by conducting an **experiment**, meaning they investigate relationships to test a hypothesis—a scientific approach.



There are two main types of experiments: lab-based experiments and natural or field experiments. In a lab setting, the research can be controlled so that perhaps more data can be recorded in a certain amount of time. In a natural or field-based experiment, the generation of data cannot be controlled but the information might be considered more accurate since it was collected without interference or intervention by the researcher.

As a research method, either type of sociological experiment is useful for testing *if-then* statements: *if* a particular thing happens, *then* another particular thing will result. To set up a lab-based experiment, sociologists create artificial situations that allow them to manipulate variables.

Classically, the sociologist selects a set of people with similar characteristics, such as age, class, race, or education. Those people are divided into two groups. One is the experimental group and the other is the control group. The experimental group is exposed to the independent variable(s) and the control group is not. To test the benefits of tutoring, for example, the sociologist might expose the experimental group of students to tutoring but not the control group. Then both groups would be tested for differences in performance to see if tutoring had an effect on the experimental group of students. As you can imagine, in a case like this, the researcher would not want to jeopardize the accomplishments of either group of students, so the setting would be somewhat artificial. The test would not be for a grade reflected on their permanent record, for example.

**Note:**

**An Experiment in Action**



Sociologist Frances Heussenstamm conducted an experiment to explore the correlation between traffic stops and race-based bumper stickers. This issue of racial profiling remains a hot-

button topic today. (Photo courtesy of dwightsghost/flickr)

A real-life example will help illustrate the experiment process. In 1971, Frances Heussenstamm, a sociology professor at California State University at Los Angeles, had a theory about police prejudice. To test her theory she conducted an experiment. She chose fifteen students from three ethnic backgrounds: black, white, and Hispanic. She chose students who routinely drove to and from campus along Los Angeles freeway routes, and who'd had perfect driving records for longer than a year. Those were her independent variables—students, good driving records, same commute route. Next, she placed a Black Panther bumper sticker on each car. That sticker, a representation of a social value, was the independent variable. In the 1970s, the Black Panthers were a revolutionary group actively fighting racism. Heussenstamm asked the students to follow their normal driving patterns. She wanted to see whether seeming support of the Black Panthers would change how these good drivers were treated by the police patrolling the highways. The dependent variable would be the number of traffic stops/citations.

The first arrest, for an incorrect lane change, was made two hours after the experiment began. One participant was pulled over three times in three days. He quit the study. After seventeen days, the fifteen drivers had collected a total of thirty-three traffic citations. The experiment was halted. The funding to pay traffic fines had run out, and so had the enthusiasm of the participants (Heussenstamm 1971).

## Secondary Data Analysis

While sociologists often engage in original research studies, they also contribute knowledge to the discipline through **secondary data analysis**. Secondary data doesn't result from firsthand research collected from primary sources, but are the already completed work of other researchers. Sociologists might study works written by historians, economists, teachers, or early sociologists. They might search through periodicals, newspapers, or magazines from any period in history.

Using available information not only saves time and money but can also add depth to a study. Sociologists often interpret findings in a new way, a way that was not part of an author's original purpose or intention. To study how women were encouraged to act and behave in the 1960s, for example, a researcher might watch movies, television shows, and situation comedies from that period. Or to research changes in behavior and attitudes due to the emergence of television in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a sociologist would rely on new interpretations of secondary data. Decades from now,

researchers will most likely conduct similar studies on the advent of mobile phones, the Internet, or Facebook.

Social scientists also learn by analyzing the research of a variety of agencies. Governmental departments and global groups, like the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics or the World Health Organization, publish studies with findings that are useful to sociologists. A public statistic like the foreclosure rate might be useful for studying the effects of the 2008 recession; a racial demographic profile might be compared with data on education funding to examine the resources accessible by different groups.

One of the advantages of secondary data is that it is **nonreactive research** (or unobtrusive research), meaning that it does not include direct contact with subjects and will not alter or influence people's behaviors. Unlike studies requiring direct contact with people, using previously published data doesn't require entering a population and the investment and risks inherent in that research process.

Using available data does have its challenges. Public records are not always easy to access. A researcher will need to do some legwork to track them down and gain access to records. To guide the search through a vast library of materials and avoid wasting time reading unrelated sources, sociologists employ **content analysis**, applying a systematic approach to record and value information gleaned from secondary data as they relate to the study at hand.

But, in some cases, there is no way to verify the accuracy of existing data. It is easy to count how many drunk drivers, for example, are pulled over by the police. But how many are not? While it's possible to discover the percentage of teenage students who drop out of high school, it might be more challenging to determine the number who return to school or get their GED later.

Another problem arises when data are unavailable in the exact form needed or do not include the precise angle the researcher seeks. For example, the average salaries paid to professors at a public school is public record. But the separate figures don't necessarily reveal how long it took each professor to reach the salary range, what their educational backgrounds are, or how long they've been teaching.

When conducting content analysis, it is important to consider the date of publication of an existing source and to take into account attitudes and common cultural ideals that may have influenced the research. For example, Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd gathered research for their book *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* in the 1920s. Attitudes and cultural norms were vastly different then than they are now. Beliefs about gender roles, race, education, and work have changed significantly since then. At the time, the study's purpose was to reveal the truth about small U.S. communities. Today, it is an illustration of 1920s' attitudes and values.

# Summary

Sociological research is a fairly complex process. As you can see, a lot goes into even a simple research design. There are many steps and much to consider when collecting data on human behavior, as well as in interpreting and analyzing data in order to form conclusive results. Sociologists use scientific methods for good reason. The scientific method provides a system of organization that helps researchers plan and conduct the study while ensuring that data and results are reliable, valid, and objective.

The many methods available to researchers—including experiments, surveys, field studies, and secondary data analysis—all come with advantages and disadvantages. The strength of a study can depend on the choice and implementation of the appropriate method of gathering research. Depending on the topic, a study might use a single method or a combination of methods. It is important to plan a research design before undertaking a study. The information gathered may in itself be surprising, and the study design should provide a solid framework in which to analyze predicted and unpredicted data.

Method	Implementation	Advantages	Challenges
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Method	Implementation	Advantages	Challenges
<b>Survey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaires</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yields many responses</li> <li>• Can survey a large sample</li> <li>• Quantitative data are easy to chart</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be time consuming</li> <li>• Can be difficult to encourage participant response</li> <li>• Captures what people think and believe but not necessarily how they behave in real life</li> </ul>
<b>Field Work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation</li> <li>• Participant observation</li> <li>• Ethnography</li> <li>• Case study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yields detailed, accurate real-life information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time consuming</li> <li>• Data captures how people behave but not what they think and believe</li> <li>• Qualitative data is difficult to organize</li> </ul>

Method	Implementation	Advantages	Challenges
Experiment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliberate manipulation of social customs and mores</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tests cause and effect relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hawthorne Effect</li> <li>• Ethical concerns about people's wellbeing</li> </ul>
Secondary Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of government data (census, health, crime statistics)</li> <li>• Research of historic documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makes good use of previous sociological information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data could be focused on a purpose other than yours</li> <li>• Data can be hard to find</li> </ul>

Main Sociological Research Methods Sociological research methods have advantages and disadvantages.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Which materials are considered secondary data?

- Photos and letters given to you by another person
- Books and articles written by other authors about their studies
- Information that you have gathered and now have included in your results
- Responses from participants whom you both surveyed and interviewed

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**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What method did researchers John Mihelich and John Papineau use to study Parrotheads?

- a. Survey
- b. Experiment
- c. Web Ethnography
- d. Case study

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Why is choosing a random sample an effective way to select participants?

- a. Participants do not know they are part of a study
- b. The researcher has no control over who is in the study
- c. It is larger than an ordinary sample
- d. Everyone has the same chance of being part of the study

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**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What research method did John S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd mainly use in their *Middletown* study?

- a. Secondary data
- b. Survey
- c. Participant observation

d. Experiment

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**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Which research approach is best suited to the scientific method?

- a. Questionnaire
  - b. Case study
  - c. Ethnography
  - d. Secondary data analysis
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

The main difference between ethnography and other types of participant observation is:

- a. ethnography isn't based on hypothesis testing
  - b. ethnography subjects are unaware they're being studied
  - c. ethnographic studies always involve minority ethnic groups
  - d. ethnography focuses on how subjects view themselves in relationship to the community
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Which best describes the results of a case study?



- a. It produces more reliable results than other methods because of its depth
- b. Its results are not generally applicable
- c. It relies solely on secondary data analysis
- d. All of the above

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Using secondary data is considered an unobtrusive or \_\_\_\_\_ research method.

- a. nonreactive
- b. nonparticipatory
- c. nonrestrictive
- d. nonconfrontive

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

## **Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What type of data do surveys gather? For what topics would surveys be the best research method? What drawbacks might you expect to encounter when using a survey? To explore further, ask a research question and write a hypothesis. Then create a survey of about six questions relevant to the topic. Provide a rationale for each question. Now define your population and create a plan for recruiting a random sample and administering the survey.

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Imagine you are about to do field research in a specific place for a set time. Instead of thinking about the topic of study itself, consider how you, as the researcher, will have to prepare for the study. What personal, social, and physical sacrifices will you have to make? How will you manage your personal effects? What organizational equipment and systems will you need to collect the data?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Create a brief research design about a topic in which you are passionately interested. Now write a letter to a philanthropic or grant organization requesting funding for your study. How can you describe the project in a convincing yet realistic and objective way? Explain how the results of your study will be a relevant contribution to the body of sociological work already in existence.

**Further Research**

For information on current real-world sociology experiments, visit:

<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Sociology-Experiments>

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## Glossary

case study

in-depth analysis of a single event, situation, or individual

content analysis

applying a systematic approach to record and value information gleaned from secondary data as it relates to the study at hand

correlation

when a change in one variable coincides with a change in another variable, but does not necessarily indicate causation

ethnography

observing a complete social setting and all that it entails

experiment

the testing of a hypothesis under controlled conditions

field research

gathering data from a natural environment without doing a lab experiment or a survey

Hawthorne effect

when study subjects behave in a certain manner due to their awareness of being observed by a researcher

interview

a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the subject

nonreactive research

using secondary data, does not include direct contact with subjects and will not alter or influence people's behaviors

participant observation

when a researcher immerses herself in a group or social setting in order to make observations from an "insider" perspective

population

a defined group serving as the subject of a study

primary data

data that are collected directly from firsthand experience

quantitative data

represent research collected in numerical form that can be counted

qualitative data

comprise information that is subjective and often based on what is seen in a natural setting

random sample

a study's participants being randomly selected to serve as a representation of a larger population

samples

small, manageable number of subjects that represent the population

secondary data analysis

using data collected by others but applying new interpretations

surveys

collect data from subjects who respond to a series of questions about behaviors and opinions, often in the form of a questionnaire

## Ethical Concerns

- Understand why ethical standards exist
- Demonstrate awareness of the American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics
- Define value neutrality

Sociologists conduct studies to shed light on human behaviors. Knowledge is a powerful tool that can be used toward positive change. And while a sociologist's goal is often simply to uncover knowledge rather than to spur action, many people use sociological studies to help improve people's lives. In that sense, conducting a sociological study comes with a tremendous amount of responsibility. Like any researchers, sociologists must consider their ethical obligation to avoid harming subjects or groups while conducting their research.

The American Sociological Association, or ASA, is the major professional organization of sociologists in North America. The ASA is a great resource for students of sociology as well. The ASA maintains a **code of ethics**—formal guidelines for conducting sociological research—consisting of principles and ethical standards to be used in the discipline. It also describes procedures for filing, investigating, and resolving complaints of unethical conduct.

Practicing sociologists and sociology students have a lot to consider. Some of the guidelines state that researchers must try to be skillful and fair-minded in their work, especially as it relates to their human subjects. Researchers must obtain participants' informed consent and inform subjects of the responsibilities and risks of research before they agree to partake. During a study, sociologists must ensure the safety of participants and immediately stop work if a subject becomes potentially endangered on any level.

Researchers are required to protect the privacy of research participants whenever possible. Even if pressured by authorities, such as police or courts, researchers are not ethically allowed to release confidential information. Researchers must make results available to other sociologists, must make public all sources of financial support, and must not accept

funding from any organization that might cause a conflict of interest or seek to influence the research results for its own purposes. The ASA's ethical considerations shape not only the study but also the publication of results.

Pioneer German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) identified another crucial ethical concern. Weber understood that personal values could distort the framework for disclosing study results. While he accepted that some aspects of research design might be influenced by personal values, he declared it was entirely inappropriate to allow personal values to shape the interpretation of the responses. Sociologists, he stated, must establish **value neutrality**, a practice of remaining impartial, without bias or judgment, during the course of a study and in publishing results (1949). Sociologists are obligated to disclose research findings without omitting or distorting significant data.

Is value neutrality possible? Many sociologists believe it is impossible to set aside personal values and retain complete objectivity. They caution readers, rather, to understand that sociological studies may, by necessity, contain a certain amount of value bias. It does not discredit the results but allows readers to view them as one form of truth rather than a singular fact. Some sociologists attempt to remain uncritical and as objective as possible when studying cultural institutions. Value neutrality does not mean having no opinions. It means striving to overcome personal biases, particularly subconscious biases, when analyzing data. It means avoiding skewing data in order to match a predetermined outcome that aligns with a particular agenda, such as a political or moral point of view. Investigators are ethically obligated to report results, even when they contradict personal views, predicted outcomes, or widely accepted beliefs.

## Summary

Sociologists and sociology students must take ethical responsibility for any study they conduct. They must first and foremost guarantee the safety of their participants. Whenever possible, they must ensure that participants have been fully informed before consenting to be part of a study.

The ASA maintains ethical guidelines that sociologists must take into account as they conduct research. The guidelines address conducting studies, properly using existing sources, accepting funding, and publishing results.

Sociologists must try to maintain value neutrality. They must gather and analyze data objectively and set aside their personal preferences, beliefs, and opinions. They must report findings accurately, even if they contradict personal convictions.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Which statement illustrates value neutrality?

- a. Obesity in children is obviously a result of parental neglect and, therefore, schools should take a greater role to prevent it
- b. In 2003, states like Arkansas adopted laws requiring elementary schools to remove soft drink vending machines from schools
- c. Merely restricting children's access to junk food at school is not enough to prevent obesity
- d. Physical activity and healthy eating are a fundamental part of a child's education

---

**Solution:**

**Answers**

B

### Exercise:

**Problem:**

Which person or organization defined the concept of value neutrality?

- a. Institutional Review Board (IRB)



- b. Peter Rossi
- c. American Sociological Association (ASA)
- d. Max Weber

---

**Solution:**  
**Answers**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

To study the effects of fast food on lifestyle, health, and culture, from which group would a researcher ethically be unable to accept funding?

- a. A fast-food restaurant
- b. A nonprofit health organization
- c. A private hospital
- d. A governmental agency like Health and Social Services

---

**Solution:**  
**Answers**

A

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Why do you think the ASA crafted such a detailed set of ethical principles? What type of study could put human participants at risk? Think of some examples of studies that might be harmful. Do you think that, in the name of sociology, some researchers might be tempted to cross boundaries that threaten human rights? Why?

## Exercise:

### Problem:

Would you willingly participate in a sociological study that could potentially put your health and safety at risk, but had the potential to help thousands or even hundreds of thousands of people? For example, would you participate in a study of a new drug that could cure diabetes or cancer, even if it meant great inconvenience and physical discomfort for you or possible permanent damage?

## Further Research

Founded in 1905, the ASA is a nonprofit organization located in Washington, DC, with a membership of 14,000 researchers, faculty members, students, and practitioners of sociology. Its mission is “to articulate policy and implement programs likely to have the broadest possible impact for sociology now and in the future.” Learn more about this organization at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/ASA>.

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## Glossary

code of ethics

a set of guidelines that the American Sociological Association has established to foster ethical research and professionally responsible scholarship in sociology

value neutrality

a practice of remaining impartial, without bias or judgment during the course of a study and in publishing results

## Introduction to Deviance, Crime, and Social Control

class="introduction"

Washington is one of several states where marijuana use has been legalized, decriminalized, or approved for medical use.

(Photo courtesy of Dominic Simpson/flickr )



Twenty-three states in the United States have passed measures legalizing marijuana in some form; the majority of these states approve only medical use of marijuana, but fourteen states have decriminalized marijuana use, and four states approve recreational use as well. Washington state legalized recreational use in 2012, and in the 2014 midterm elections, voters in Alaska, Oregon, and Washington DC supported ballot measures to allow recreational use in their states as well (Governing 2014). Florida's 2014 medical marijuana proposal fell just short of the 60 percent needed to pass (CBS News 2014).

The Pew Research Center found that a majority of people in the United States (52 percent) now favor legalizing marijuana. This 2013 finding was the first time that a majority of survey respondents supported making marijuana legal. A question about marijuana's legal status was first asked in a 1969 Gallup poll, and only 12 percent of U.S. adults favored legalization at that time. Pew also found that 76 percent of those surveyed currently do not favor jail time for individuals convicted of minor possession of marijuana (Motel 2014).

Even though many people favor legalization, 45 percent do not agree (Motel 2014). Legalization of marijuana in any form remains controversial and is actively opposed; Citizen's Against Legalizing Marijuana (CALM) is one of the largest political action committees (PACs) working to prevent or repeal legalization measures. As in many aspects of sociology, there are no absolute answers about deviance. What people agree is deviant differs in various societies and subcultures, and it may change over time.

Tattoos, vegan lifestyles, single parenthood, breast implants, and even jogging were once considered deviant but are now widely accepted. The change process usually takes some time and may be accompanied by significant disagreement, especially for social norms that are viewed as essential. For example, divorce affects the social institution of family, and so divorce carried a deviant and stigmatized status at one time. Marijuana use was once seen as deviant and criminal, but U.S. social norms on this issue are changing.

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## Deviance and Control

- Define deviance, and explain the nature of deviant behavior
- Differentiate between methods of social control



Much of the appeal of watching entertainers perform in drag comes from the humor inherent in seeing everyday norms violated. (Photo courtesy of Cassiopeiya/Wikimedia Commons)

What, exactly, is deviance? And what is the relationship between deviance and crime? According to sociologist William Graham Sumner, **deviance** is a violation of established contextual, cultural, or social norms, whether folkways, mores, or codified law (1906). It can be as minor as picking your nose in public or as major as committing murder. Although the word “deviance” has a negative connotation in everyday language, sociologists recognize that deviance is not necessarily bad (Schoepflin 2011). In fact, from a structural functionalist perspective, one of the positive contributions of deviance is that it fosters social change. For example, during the U.S. civil rights movement, Rosa Parks violated social norms when she refused to move to the “black section” of the bus, and the Little Rock Nine broke customs of segregation to attend an Arkansas public school.

“What is deviant behavior?” cannot be answered in a straightforward manner. Whether an act is labeled deviant or not depends on many factors, including location, audience, and the individual committing the act (Becker 1963). Listening to your iPod on the way to class is considered acceptable behavior. Listening to your iPod during your 2 p.m. sociology lecture is considered rude. Listening to your iPod when on the witness stand before a judge may cause you to be held in contempt of court and consequently fined or jailed.

As norms vary across culture and time, it makes sense that notions of deviance change also. Fifty years ago, public schools in the United States had strict dress codes that, among other stipulations, often banned women from wearing pants to class. Today, it’s socially acceptable for women to wear pants, but less so for men to wear skirts. In a time of war, acts usually considered morally reprehensible, such as taking the life of another, may actually be rewarded. Whether an act is deviant or not depends on society’s response to that act.

**Note:****Why I Drive a Hearse**

When sociologist Todd Schoepflin ran into his childhood friend Bill, he was shocked to see him driving a hearse instead of an ordinary car. A professionally trained researcher, Schoepflin wondered what effect driving a hearse had on his friend and what effect it might have on others on the road. Would using such a vehicle for everyday errands be considered deviant by most people?

Schoepflin interviewed Bill, curious first to know why he drove such an unconventional car. Bill had simply been on the lookout for a reliable winter car; on a tight budget, he searched used car ads and stumbled upon one for the hearse. The car ran well, and the price was right, so he bought it.

Bill admitted that others’ reactions to the car had been mixed. His parents were appalled, and he received odd stares from his coworkers. A mechanic once refused to work on it, and stated that it was “a dead person machine.” On the whole, however, Bill received mostly positive reactions. Strangers



gave him a thumbs-up on the highway and stopped him in parking lots to chat about his car. His girlfriend loved it, his friends wanted to take it tailgating, and people offered to buy it. Could it be that driving a hearse isn't really so deviant after all?

Schoepflin theorized that, although viewed as outside conventional norms, driving a hearse is such a mild form of deviance that it actually becomes a mark of distinction. Conformists find the choice of vehicle intriguing or appealing, while nonconformists see a fellow oddball to whom they can relate. As one of Bill's friends remarked, "Every guy wants to own a unique car like this, and *you* can certainly pull it off." Such anecdotes remind us that although deviance is often viewed as a violation of norms, it's not always viewed in a negative light (Schoepflin 2011).



A hearse with the license plate "LASTRYD." How would you view the owner of this car?  
(Photo courtesy of Brian Teutsch/flickr)

## Social Control

When a person violates a social norm, what happens? A driver caught speeding can receive a speeding ticket. A student who wears a bathrobe to class gets a warning from a professor. An adult belching loudly is avoided.

All societies practice **social control**, the regulation and enforcement of norms. The underlying goal of social control is to maintain **social order**, an arrangement of practices and behaviors on which society's members base their daily lives. Think of social order as an employee handbook and social control as a manager. When a worker violates a workplace guideline, the manager steps in to enforce the rules; when an employee is doing an exceptionally good job at following the rules, the manager may praise or promote the employee.

The means of enforcing rules are known as **sanctions**. Sanctions can be positive as well as negative. **Positive sanctions** are rewards given for conforming to norms. A promotion at work is a positive sanction for working hard. **Negative sanctions** are punishments for violating norms. Being arrested is a punishment for shoplifting. Both types of sanctions play a role in social control.

Sociologists also classify sanctions as formal or informal. Although shoplifting, a form of social deviance, may be illegal, there are no laws dictating the proper way to scratch your nose. That doesn't mean picking your nose in public won't be punished; instead, you will encounter **informal sanctions**. Informal sanctions emerge in face-to-face social interactions. For example, wearing flip-flops to an opera or swearing loudly in church may draw disapproving looks or even verbal reprimands, whereas behavior that is seen as positive—such as helping an old man carry grocery bags across the street—may receive positive informal reactions, such as a smile or pat on the back.

**Formal sanctions**, on the other hand, are ways to officially recognize and enforce norm violations. If a student violates her college's code of conduct, for example, she might be expelled. Someone who speaks inappropriately to the boss could be fired. Someone who commits a crime may be arrested or imprisoned. On the positive side, a soldier who saves a life may receive an official commendation.

The table below shows the relationship between different types of sanctions.

	<b>Informal</b>	<b>Formal</b>
Positive	An expression of thanks	A promotion at work
Negative	An angry comment	A parking fine

Informal/Formal Sanctions Formal and informal sanctions may be positive or negative. Informal sanctions arise in social interactions, whereas formal sanctions officially enforce norms.

## Summary

Deviance is a violation of norms. Whether or not something is deviant depends on contextual definitions, the situation, and people's response to the behavior. Society seeks to limit deviance through the use of sanctions that help maintain a system of social control.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Which of the following best describes how deviance is defined?

- a. Deviance is defined by federal, state, and local laws.
- b. Deviance's definition is determined by one's religion.
- c. Deviance occurs whenever someone else is harmed by an action.
- d. Deviance is socially defined.

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

D

### Exercise:

**Problem:**

During the civil rights movement, Rosa Parks and other black protestors spoke out against segregation by refusing to sit at the back of the bus. This is an example of \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. An act of social control
- b. An act of deviance
- c. A social norm
- d. Criminal mores

---

**Solution:****Answer**

B

**Exercise:****Problem:**

A student has a habit of talking on her cell phone during class. One day, the professor stops his lecture and asks her to respect the other students in the class by turning off her phone. In this situation, the professor used \_\_\_\_\_ to maintain social control.

- a. Informal negative sanctions
- b. Informal positive sanctions
- c. Formal negative sanctions
- d. Formal positive sanctions

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Societies practice social control to maintain \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. formal sanctions
- b. social order
- c. cultural deviance
- d. sanction labeling

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

One day, you decide to wear pajamas to the grocery store. While you shop, you notice people giving you strange looks and whispering to others. In this case, the grocery store patrons are demonstrating \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. deviance
- b. formal sanctions
- c. informal sanctions
- d. positive sanctions

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

If given the choice, would you purchase an unusual car such as a hearse for everyday use? How would your friends, family, or significant other react? Since deviance is culturally defined, most of the decisions we make are dependent on the reactions of others. Is there anything the people in your life encourage you to do that you don't? Why don't you?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Think of a recent time when you used informal negative sanctions. To what act of deviance were you responding? How did your actions affect the deviant person or persons? How did your reaction help maintain social control?

**Further Research**

Although we rarely think of it in this way, deviance can have a positive effect on society. Check out the Positive Deviance Initiative, a program initiated by Tufts University to promote social movements around the world that strive to improve people's lives, at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Positive\\_Deviance](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Positive_Deviance).

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## **Glossary**

deviance

a violation of contextual, cultural, or social norms

formal sanctions

sanctions that are officially recognized and enforced

informal sanctions

sanctions that occur in face-to-face interactions

negative sanctions

punishments for violating norms

positive sanctions

rewards given for conforming to norms

sanctions

the means of enforcing rules

social control

the regulation and enforcement of norms

social order

an arrangement of practices and behaviors on which society's members base their daily lives

## Theoretical Perspectives on Deviance

- Describe the functionalist view of deviance in society through four sociologist's theories
- Explain how conflict theory understands deviance and crime in society
- Describe the symbolic interactionist approach to deviance, including labeling and other theories



Functionalists believe that deviance plays an important role in society and can be used to challenge people's views. Protesters, such as these PETA members, often use this method to draw attention to their cause. (Photo courtesy of David Shankbone/flickr)

Why does deviance occur? How does it affect a society? Since the early days of sociology, scholars have developed theories that attempt to explain what deviance and crime mean to society. These theories can be grouped according to the three major sociological paradigms: functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and conflict theory.

### Functionalism

Sociologists who follow the functionalist approach are concerned with the way the different elements of a society contribute to the whole. They view deviance as a key component of a functioning society. Strain theory, social



disorganization theory, and cultural deviance theory represent three functionalist perspectives on deviance in society.

### **Émile Durkheim: The Essential Nature of Deviance**

Émile Durkheim believed that deviance is a necessary part of a successful society. One way deviance is functional, he argued, is that it challenges people's present views (1893). For instance, when black students across the United States participated in sit-ins during the civil rights movement, they challenged society's notions of segregation. Moreover, Durkheim noted, when deviance is punished, it reaffirms currently held social norms, which also contributes to society (1893). Seeing a student given detention for skipping class reminds other high schoolers that playing hooky isn't allowed and that they, too, could get detention.

### **Robert Merton: Strain Theory**

Sociologist Robert Merton agreed that deviance is an inherent part of a functioning society, but he expanded on Durkheim's ideas by developing **strain theory**, which notes that access to socially acceptable goals plays a part in determining whether a person conforms or deviates. From birth, we're encouraged to achieve the "American Dream" of financial success. A woman who attends business school, receives her MBA, and goes on to make a million-dollar income as CEO of a company is said to be a success. However, not everyone in our society stands on equal footing. A person may have the socially acceptable goal of financial success but lack a socially acceptable way to reach that goal. According to Merton's theory, an entrepreneur who can't afford to launch his own company may be tempted to embezzle from his employer for start-up funds.

Merton defined five ways people respond to this gap between having a socially accepted goal and having no socially accepted way to pursue it.

1. *Conformity*: Those who conform choose not to deviate. They pursue their goals to the extent that they can through socially accepted means.
2. *Innovation*: Those who innovate pursue goals they cannot reach through legitimate means by instead using criminal or deviant means.
3. *Ritualism*: People who ritualize lower their goals until they can reach them through socially acceptable ways. These members of society focus on conformity rather than attaining a distant dream.
4. *Retreatism*: Others retreat and reject society's goals and means. Some beggars and street people have withdrawn from society's goal of financial success.
5. *Rebellion*: A handful of people rebel and replace a society's goals and means with their own. Terrorists or freedom fighters look to overthrow a society's goals through socially unacceptable means.

## **Social Disorganization Theory**

Developed by researchers at the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s, **social disorganization theory** asserts that crime is most likely to occur in communities with weak social ties and the absence of social control. An individual who grows up in a poor neighborhood with high rates of drug use, violence, teenage delinquency, and deprived parenting is more likely to become a criminal than an individual from a wealthy neighborhood with a good school system and families who are involved positively in the community.



Proponents of social disorganization theory believe that individuals who grow up in impoverished areas are more likely to participate in deviant or criminal behaviors. (Photo courtesy of Apollo 1758/Wikimedia Commons)

Social disorganization theory points to broad social factors as the cause of deviance. A person isn't born a criminal but becomes one over time, often based on factors in his or her social environment. Research into social disorganization theory can greatly influence public policy. For instance, studies have found that children from disadvantaged communities who attend preschool programs that teach basic social skills are significantly less likely to engage in criminal activity.

### **Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay: Cultural Deviance Theory**

**Cultural deviance theory** suggests that conformity to the prevailing cultural norms of lower-class society causes crime. Researchers Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1942) studied crime patterns in Chicago in the early 1900s. They found that violence and crime were at their worst in the

middle of the city and gradually decreased the farther someone traveled from the urban center toward the suburbs. Shaw and McKay noticed that this pattern matched the migration patterns of Chicago citizens. New immigrants, many of them poor and lacking knowledge of the English language, lived in neighborhoods inside the city. As the urban population expanded, wealthier people moved to the suburbs and left behind the less privileged.

Shaw and McKay concluded that socioeconomic status correlated to race and ethnicity resulted in a higher crime rate. The mix of cultures and values created a smaller society with different ideas of deviance, and those values and ideas were transferred from generation to generation.

The theory of Shaw and McKay has been further tested and expounded upon by Robert Sampson and Byron Groves (1989). They found that poverty, ethnic diversity, and family disruption in given localities had a strong positive correlation with social disorganization. They also determined that social disorganization was, in turn, associated with high rates of crime and delinquency—or deviance. Recent studies Sampson conducted with Lydia Bean (2006) revealed similar findings. High rates of poverty and single-parent homes correlated with high rates of juvenile violence.

## **Conflict Theory**

**Conflict theory** looks to social and economic factors as the causes of crime and deviance. Unlike functionalists, conflict theorists don't see these factors as positive functions of society. They see them as evidence of inequality in the system. They also challenge social disorganization theory and control theory and argue that both ignore racial and socioeconomic issues and oversimplify social trends (Akers 1991). Conflict theorists also look for answers to the correlation of gender and race with wealth and crime.

## **Karl Marx: An Unequal System**

**Conflict theory** was greatly influenced by the work of German philosopher, economist, and social scientist Karl Marx. Marx believed that the general population was divided into two groups. He labeled the wealthy, who controlled the means of production and business, the bourgeois. He labeled the workers who depended on the bourgeois for employment and survival the proletariat. Marx believed that the bourgeois centralized their power and influence through government, laws, and other authority agencies in order to maintain and expand their positions of power in society. Though Marx spoke little of deviance, his ideas created the foundation for conflict theorists who study the intersection of deviance and crime with wealth and power.

### **C. Wright Mills: The Power Elite**

In his book *The Power Elite* (1956), sociologist C. Wright Mills described the existence of what he dubbed the **power elite**, a small group of wealthy and influential people at the top of society who hold the power and resources. Wealthy executives, politicians, celebrities, and military leaders often have access to national and international power, and in some cases, their decisions affect everyone in society. Because of this, the rules of society are stacked in favor of a privileged few who manipulate them to stay on top. It is these people who decide what is criminal and what is not, and the effects are often felt most by those who have little power. Mills' theories explain why celebrities such as Chris Brown and Paris Hilton, or once-powerful politicians such as Eliot Spitzer and Tom DeLay, can commit crimes and suffer little or no legal retribution.

### **Crime and Social Class**

While crime is often associated with the underprivileged, crimes committed by the wealthy and powerful remain an under-punished and costly problem within society. The FBI reported that victims of burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft lost a total of \$15.3 billion dollars in 2009 (FBI 2010). In comparison, when former advisor and financier Bernie Madoff was

arrested in 2008, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission reported that the estimated losses of his financial Ponzi scheme fraud were close to \$50 billion (SEC 2009).

This imbalance based on class power is also found within U.S. criminal law. In the 1980s, the use of crack cocaine (cocaine in its purest form) quickly became an epidemic that swept the country's poorest urban communities. Its pricier counterpart, cocaine, was associated with upscale users and was a drug of choice for the wealthy. The legal implications of being caught by authorities with crack versus cocaine were starkly different. In 1986, federal law mandated that being caught in possession of 50 grams of crack was punishable by a ten-year prison sentence. An equivalent prison sentence for cocaine possession, however, required possession of 5,000 grams. In other words, the sentencing disparity was 1 to 100 (New York Times Editorial Staff 2011). This inequality in the severity of punishment for crack versus cocaine paralleled the unequal social class of respective users. A conflict theorist would note that those in society who hold the power are also the ones who make the laws concerning crime. In doing so, they make laws that will benefit them, while the powerless classes who lack the resources to make such decisions suffer the consequences. The crack-cocaine punishment disparity remained until 2010, when President Obama signed the Fair Sentencing Act, which decreased the disparity to 1 to 18 (The Sentencing Project 2010).



From 1986 until 2010, the punishment for possessing

crack, a “poor person’s drug,”  
was 100 times stricter than the  
punishment for cocaine use, a  
drug favored by the wealthy.  
(Photo courtesy of Wikimedia  
Commons)

## Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical approach that can be used to explain how societies and/or social groups come to view behaviors as deviant or conventional. Labeling theory, differential association, social disorganization theory, and control theory fall within the realm of symbolic interactionism.

### Labeling Theory

Although all of us violate norms from time to time, few people would consider themselves deviant. Those who do, however, have often been labeled “deviant” by society and have gradually come to believe it themselves. **Labeling theory** examines the ascribing of a deviant behavior to another person by members of society. Thus, what is considered deviant is determined not so much by the behaviors themselves or the people who commit them, but by the reactions of others to these behaviors. As a result, what is considered deviant changes over time and can vary significantly across cultures.

Sociologist Edwin Lemert expanded on the concepts of labeling theory and identified two types of deviance that affect identity formation. **Primary deviance** is a violation of norms that does not result in any long-term effects on the individual’s self-image or interactions with others. Speeding is a deviant act, but receiving a speeding ticket generally does not make others view you as a bad person, nor does it alter your own self-concept.

Individuals who engage in primary deviance still maintain a feeling of belonging in society and are likely to continue to conform to norms in the future.

Sometimes, in more extreme cases, primary deviance can morph into secondary deviance. **Secondary deviance** occurs when a person's self-concept and behavior begin to change after his or her actions are labeled as deviant by members of society. The person may begin to take on and fulfill the role of a "deviant" as an act of rebellion against the society that has labeled that individual as such. For example, consider a high school student who often cuts class and gets into fights. The student is reprimanded frequently by teachers and school staff, and soon enough, he develops a reputation as a "troublemaker." As a result, the student starts acting out even more and breaking more rules; he has adopted the "troublemaker" label and embraced this deviant identity. Secondary deviance can be so strong that it bestows a **master status** on an individual. A master status is a label that describes the chief characteristic of an individual. Some people see themselves primarily as doctors, artists, or grandfathers. Others see themselves as beggars, convicts, or addicts.

**Note:**

**The Right to Vote**

Before she lost her job as an administrative assistant, Leola Strickland postdated and mailed a handful of checks for amounts ranging from \$90 to \$500. By the time she was able to find a new job, the checks had bounced, and she was convicted of fraud under Mississippi law. Strickland pleaded guilty to a felony charge and repaid her debts; in return, she was spared from serving prison time.

Strickland appeared in court in 2001. More than ten years later, she is still feeling the sting of her sentencing. Why? Because Mississippi is one of twelve states in the United States that bans convicted felons from voting (ProCon 2011).

To Strickland, who said she had always voted, the news came as a great shock. She isn't alone. Some 5.3 million people in the United States are currently barred from voting because of felony convictions (ProCon 2009).



These individuals include inmates, parolees, probationers, and even people who have never been jailed, such as Leola Strickland.

Under the Fourteenth Amendment, states are allowed to deny voting privileges to individuals who have participated in “rebellion or other crime” (Krajick 2004). Although there are no federally mandated laws on the matter, most states practice at least one form of *felony disenfranchisement*. At present, it’s estimated that approximately 2.4 percent of the possible voting population is disenfranchised, that is, lacking the right to vote (ProCon 2011).

Is it fair to prevent citizens from participating in such an important process? Proponents of disenfranchisement laws argue that felons have a debt to pay to society. Being stripped of their right to vote is part of the punishment for criminal deeds. Such proponents point out that voting isn’t the only instance in which ex-felons are denied rights; state laws also ban released criminals from holding public office, obtaining professional licenses, and sometimes even inheriting property (Lott and Jones 2008). Opponents of felony disenfranchisement in the United States argue that voting is a basic human right and should be available to all citizens regardless of past deeds. Many point out that felony disenfranchisement has its roots in the 1800s, when it was used primarily to block black citizens from voting. Even nowadays, these laws disproportionately target poor minority members, denying them a chance to participate in a system that, as a social conflict theorist would point out, is already constructed to their disadvantage (Holding 2006). Those who cite labeling theory worry that denying deviants the right to vote will only further encourage deviant behavior. If ex-criminals are disenfranchised from voting, are they being disenfranchised from society?



Should a former  
felony conviction  
permanently strip a  
U.S. citizen of the  
right to vote? (Photo  
courtesy of Joshin  
Yamada/flickr)

## Edwin Sutherland: Differential Association

In the early 1900s, sociologist Edwin Sutherland sought to understand how deviant behavior developed among people. Since criminology was a young field, he drew on other aspects of sociology including social interactions and group learning (Laub 2006). His conclusions established **differential association theory**, which suggested that individuals learn deviant behavior from those close to them who provide models of and opportunities for deviance. According to Sutherland, deviance is less a personal choice and

more a result of differential socialization processes. A tween whose friends are sexually active is more likely to view sexual activity as acceptable.

Sutherland's theory may explain why crime is multigenerational. A longitudinal study beginning in the 1960s found that the best predictor of antisocial and criminal behavior in children was whether their parents had been convicted of a crime (Todd and Jury 1996). Children who were younger than ten years old when their parents were convicted were more likely than other children to engage in spousal abuse and criminal behavior by their early thirties. Even when taking socioeconomic factors such as dangerous neighborhoods, poor school systems, and overcrowded housing into consideration, researchers found that parents were the main influence on the behavior of their offspring (Todd and Jury 1996).

### **Travis Hirschi: Control Theory**

Continuing with an examination of large social factors, **control theory** states that social control is directly affected by the strength of social bonds and that deviance results from a feeling of disconnection from society. Individuals who believe they are a part of society are less likely to commit crimes against it.

Travis Hirschi (1969) identified four types of social bonds that connect people to society:

1. *Attachment* measures our connections to others. When we are closely attached to people, we worry about their opinions of us. People conform to society's norms in order to gain approval (and prevent disapproval) from family, friends, and romantic partners.
2. *Commitment* refers to the investments we make in the community. A well-respected local businesswoman who volunteers at her synagogue and is a member of the neighborhood block organization has more to lose from committing a crime than a woman who doesn't have a career or ties to the community.
3. Similarly, levels of *involvement*, or participation in socially legitimate activities, lessen a person's likelihood of deviance. Children who are

- members of little league baseball teams have fewer family crises.
4. The final bond, *belief*, is an agreement on common values in society. If a person views social values as beliefs, he or she will conform to them. An environmentalist is more likely to pick up trash in a park, because a clean environment is a social value to him (Hirschi 1969).

<b>Functionalism</b>	<b>Associated Theorist</b>	<b>Deviance arises from:</b>
Strain Theory	Robert Merton	A lack of ways to reach socially accepted goals by accepted methods
Social Disorganization Theory	University of Chicago researchers	Weak social ties and a lack of social control; society has lost the ability to enforce norms with some groups
Cultural Deviance Theory	Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay	Conformity to the cultural norms of lower-class society
<b>Conflict Theory</b>	<b>Associated Theorist</b>	<b>Deviance arises from:</b>
Unequal System	Karl Marx	Inequalities in wealth and power that arise from the economic system
Power Elite	C. Wright Mills	Ability of those in power to define deviance in ways that

		maintain the status quo
<b>Symbolic Interactionism</b>	<b>Associated Theorist</b>	<b>Deviance arises from:</b>
Labeling Theory	Edwin Lemert	The reactions of others, particularly those in power who are able to determine labels
Differential Association Theory	Edwin Sutherland	Learning and modeling deviant behavior seen in other people close to the individual
Control Theory	Travis Hirschi	Feelings of disconnection from society

## Summary

The three major sociological paradigms offer different explanations for the motivation behind deviance and crime. Functionalists point out that deviance is a social necessity since it reinforces norms by reminding people of the consequences of violating them. Violating norms can open society's eyes to injustice in the system. Conflict theorists argue that crime stems from a system of inequality that keeps those with power at the top and those without power at the bottom. Symbolic interactionists focus attention on the socially constructed nature of the labels related to deviance. Crime and deviance are learned from the environment and enforced or discouraged by those around us.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:**

A student wakes up late and realizes her sociology exam starts in five minutes. She jumps into her car and speeds down the road, where she is pulled over by a police officer. The student explains that she is running late, and the officer lets her off with a warning. The student's actions are an example of \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. primary deviance
- b. positive deviance
- c. secondary deviance
- d. master deviance

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A

**Exercise:****Problem:**

According to C. Wright Mills, which of the following people is most likely to be a member of the power elite?

- a. A war veteran
- b. A senator
- c. A professor
- d. A mechanic

---

**Solution:****Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

According to social disorganization theory, crime is most likely to occur where?

- a. A community where neighbors don't know each other very well
- b. A neighborhood with mostly elderly citizens
- c. A city with a large minority population
- d. A college campus with students who are very competitive

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Shaw and McKay found that crime is linked primarily to \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. power
- b. master status
- c. family values
- d. wealth

---

**Solution:****Answer**

D

**Exercise:****Problem:**

According to the concept of the power elite, why would a celebrity such as Charlie Sheen commit a crime?

- a. Because his parents committed similar crimes
  - b. Because his fame protects him from retribution
  - c. Because his fame disconnects him from society
  - d. Because he is challenging socially accepted norms
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

A convicted sexual offender is released on parole and arrested two weeks later for repeated sexual crimes. How would labeling theory explain this?

- a. The offender has been labeled deviant by society and has accepted a new master status.
  - b. The offender has returned to his old neighborhood and so reestablished his former habits.
  - c. The offender has lost the social bonds he made in prison and feels disconnected from society.
  - d. The offender is poor and responding to the different cultural values that exist in his community.
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

\_\_\_\_\_ deviance is a violation of norms that \_\_\_\_\_ result in a person being labeled a deviant.



- a. Secondary; does not
  - b. Negative; does
  - c. Primary; does not
  - d. Primary; may or may not
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

## Short Answer

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Pick a famous politician, business leader, or celebrity who has been arrested recently. What crime did he or she allegedly commit? Who was the victim? Explain his or her actions from the point of view of one of the major sociological paradigms. What factors best explain how this person might be punished if convicted of the crime?

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

If we assume that the power elite's status is always passed down from generation to generation, how would Edwin Sutherland explain these patterns of power through differential association theory? What crimes do these elite few get away with?

## Further Research

The Skull and Bones Society made news in 2004 when it was revealed that then-President George W. Bush and his Democratic challenger, John Kerry, had both been members at Yale University. In the years since, conspiracy theorists have linked the secret society to numerous world events, arguing

that many of the nation's most powerful people are former Bonesmen. Although such ideas may raise a lot of skepticism, many influential people of the past century have been Skull and Bones Society members, and the society is sometimes described as a college version of the power elite. Journalist Rebecca Leung discusses the roots of the club and the impact its ties between decision-makers can have later in life. Read about it at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Skull and Bones](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Skull_and_Bones).

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## Glossary

### conflict theory

a theory that examines social and economic factors as the causes of criminal deviance

### control theory

a theory that states social control is directly affected by the strength of social bonds and that deviance results from a feeling of disconnection from society

### cultural deviance theory

a theory that suggests conformity to the prevailing cultural norms of lower-class society causes crime

### differential association theory

a theory that states individuals learn deviant behavior from those close to them who provide models of and opportunities for deviance

### labeling theory

the ascribing of a deviant behavior to another person by members of society

master status

a label that describes the chief characteristic of an individual

power elite

a small group of wealthy and influential people at the top of society who hold the power and resources

primary deviance

a violation of norms that does not result in any long-term effects on the individual's self-image or interactions with others

secondary deviance

deviance that occurs when a person's self-concept and behavior begin to change after his or her actions are labeled as deviant by members of society

social disorganization theory

a theory that asserts crime occurs in communities with weak social ties and the absence of social control

strain theory

a theory that addresses the relationship between having socially acceptable goals and having socially acceptable means to reach those goals

## Crime and the Law

- Identify and differentiate between different types of crimes
- Evaluate U.S. crime statistics
- Understand the three branches of the U.S. criminal justice system



How is a crime different from other types of deviance? (Photo courtesy of Duffman/Wikimedia Commons.)

Although deviance is a violation of social norms, it's not always punishable, and it's not necessarily bad. **Crime**, on the other hand, is a behavior that violates official law and is punishable through formal sanctions. Walking to class backward is a deviant behavior. Driving with a blood alcohol percentage over the state's limit is a crime. Like other forms of deviance, however, ambiguity exists concerning what constitutes a crime and whether all crimes are, in fact, "bad" and deserve punishment. For example, during the 1960s, civil rights activists often violated laws intentionally as part of their effort to bring about racial equality. In hindsight, we recognize that the laws that deemed many of their actions crimes—for instance, Rosa Parks taking a seat in the "whites only" section of the bus—were inconsistent with social equality.

As you have learned, all societies have informal and formal ways of maintaining social control. Within these systems of norms, societies have **legal codes** that maintain formal social control through laws, which are rules adopted and enforced by a political authority. Those who violate these rules incur negative formal sanctions. Normally, punishments are relative to the degree of the crime and the importance to society of the value underlying the law. As we will see, however, there are other factors that influence criminal sentencing.

## Types of Crimes

Not all crimes are given equal weight. Society generally socializes its members to view certain crimes as more severe than others. For example, most people would consider murdering someone to be far worse than stealing a wallet and would expect a murderer to be punished more severely than a thief. In modern U.S. society, crimes are classified as one of two types based on their severity. **Violent crimes** (also known as “crimes against a person”) are based on the use of force or the threat of force. Rape, murder, and armed robbery fall under this category. **Nonviolent crimes** involve the destruction or theft of property but do not use force or the threat of force. Because of this, they are also sometimes called “property crimes.” Larceny, car theft, and vandalism are all types of nonviolent crimes. If you use a crowbar to break into a car, you are committing a nonviolent crime; if you mug someone with the crowbar, you are committing a violent crime.

When we think of crime, we often picture **street crime**, or offenses committed by ordinary people against other people or organizations, usually in public spaces. An often overlooked category is **corporate crime**, or crime committed by white-collar workers in a business environment. Embezzlement, insider trading, and identity theft are all types of corporate crime. Although these types of offenses rarely receive the same amount of media coverage as street crimes, they can be far more damaging. Financial frauds such as insurance scams, Ponzi schemes, and improper practices by banks can devastate families who lose their savings or home.

An often-debated third type of crime is **victimless crime**. Crimes are called victimless when the perpetrator is not explicitly harming another person. As

opposed to battery or theft, which clearly have a victim, a crime like drinking a beer when someone is twenty years old or selling a sexual act do not result in injury to anyone other than the individual who engages in them, although they are illegal. While some claim acts like these are victimless, others argue that they actually do harm society. Prostitution may foster abuse toward women by clients or pimps. Drug use may increase the likelihood of employee absences. Such debates highlight how the deviant and criminal nature of actions develops through ongoing public discussion.

**Note:**

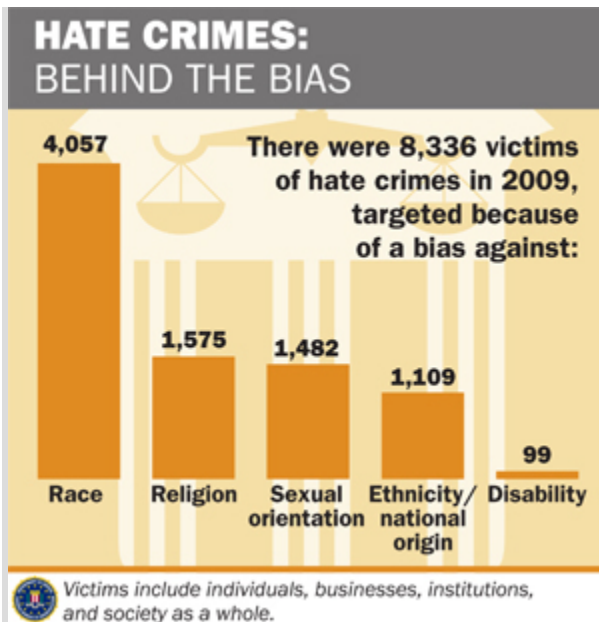
**Hate Crimes**

On the evening of October 3, 2010, a seventeen-year-old boy from the Bronx was abducted by a group of young men from his neighborhood and taken to an abandoned row house. After being beaten, the boy admitted he was gay. His attackers seized his partner and beat him as well. Both victims were drugged, sodomized, and forced to burn one another with cigarettes. When questioned by police, the ringleader of the crime explained that the victims were gay and “looked like [they] liked it” (Wilson and Baker 2010).

Attacks based on a person’s race, religion, or other characteristics are known as **hate crimes**. Hate crimes in the United States evolved from the time of early European settlers and their violence toward Native Americans. Such crimes weren’t investigated until the early 1900s, when the Ku Klux Klan began to draw national attention for its activities against blacks and other groups. The term “hate crime,” however, didn’t become official until the 1980s (Federal Bureau of Investigations 2011).

An average of 195,000 Americans fall victim to hate crimes each year, but fewer than five percent ever report the crime (FBI 2010). The majority of hate crimes are racially motivated, but many are based on religious (especially anti-Semitic) prejudice (FBI 2010). After incidents like the murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming in 1998 and the tragic suicide of Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi in 2010, there has been a growing awareness of hate crimes based on sexual orientation.





In the United States, there were 8,336 reported victims of hate crimes in 2009. This represents less than five percent of the number of people who claimed to be victims of hate crimes when surveyed. (Graph courtesy of FBI 2010)

## Crime Statistics

The FBI gathers data from approximately 17,000 law enforcement agencies, and the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) is the annual publication of this data (FBI 2011). The UCR has comprehensive information from police reports but fails to account for the many crimes that go unreported, often due to victims' fear, shame, or distrust of the police. The quality of this data is also inconsistent because of differences in approaches to gathering victim data; important details are not always asked for or reported (Cantor and Lynch 2000).

Due to these issues, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics publishes a separate self-report study known as the National Crime Victimization Report (NCVR). A **self-report study** is a collection of data gathered using voluntary response methods, such as questionnaires or telephone interviews. Self-report data are gathered each year, asking approximately 160,000 people in the United States about the frequency and types of crime they've experienced in their daily lives (BJS 2013). The NCVR reports a higher rate of crime than the UCR, likely picking up information on crimes that were experienced but never reported to the police. Age, race, gender, location, and income-level demographics are also analyzed (National Archive of Criminal Justice Data 2010).

The NCVR survey format allows people to more openly discuss their experiences and also provides a more-detailed examination of crimes, which may include information about consequences, relationship between victim and criminal, and substance abuse involved. One disadvantage is that the NCVR misses some groups of people, such as those who don't have telephones and those who move frequently. The quality of information may also be reduced by inaccurate victim recall of the crime (Cantor and Lynch 2000).

## **Public Perception of Crime**

Neither the NCVR nor the UCS accounts for all crime in the United States, but general trends can be determined. Crime rates, particularly for violent and gun-related crimes, have been on the decline since peaking in the early 1990s (Cohn, Taylor, Lopez, Gallagher, Parker, and Maass 2013). However, the public believes crime rates are still high, or even worsening. Recent surveys (Saad 2011; Pew Research Center 2013, cited in Overburg and Hoyer 2013) have found U.S. adults believe crime is worse now than it was twenty years ago.

Inaccurate public perception of crime may be heightened by popular crime shows such as *CSI*, *Criminal Minds* and *Law & Order* (Warr 2008) and by extensive and repeated media coverage of crime. Many researchers have found that people who closely follow media reports of crime are likely to estimate the crime rate as inaccurately high and more likely to feel fearful

about the chances of experiencing crime (Chiricos, Padgett, and Gertz 2000). Recent research has also found that people who reported watching news coverage of 9/11 or the Boston Marathon Bombing for more than an hour daily became more fearful of future terrorism (Holman, Garfin, and Silver 2014).

## **The U.S. Criminal Justice System**

A **criminal justice system** is an organization that exists to enforce a legal code. There are three branches of the U.S. criminal justice system: the police, the courts, and the corrections system.

### **Police**

**Police** are a civil force in charge of enforcing laws and public order at a federal, state, or community level. No unified national police force exists in the United States, although there are federal law enforcement officers. Federal officers operate under specific government agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI); the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF); and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Federal officers can only deal with matters that are explicitly within the power of the federal government, and their field of expertise is usually narrow. A county police officer may spend time responding to emergency calls, working at the local jail, or patrolling areas as needed, whereas a federal officer would be more likely to investigate suspects in firearms trafficking or provide security for government officials.

State police have the authority to enforce statewide laws, including regulating traffic on highways. Local or county police, on the other hand, have a limited jurisdiction with authority only in the town or county in which they serve.



Here, Afghan National Police  
Crisis Response Unit members  
train in Surobi, Afghanistan.

(Photo courtesy of  
isafmedia/flickr)

## Courts

Once a crime has been committed and a violator has been identified by the police, the case goes to court. A **court** is a system that has the authority to make decisions based on law. The U.S. judicial system is divided into federal courts and state courts. As the name implies, federal courts (including the U.S. Supreme Court) deal with federal matters, including trade disputes, military justice, and government lawsuits. Judges who preside over federal courts are selected by the president with the consent of Congress.

State courts vary in their structure but generally include three levels: trial courts, appellate courts, and state supreme courts. In contrast to the large courtroom trials in TV shows, most noncriminal cases are decided by a judge without a jury present. Traffic court and small claims court are both types of trial courts that handle specific civil matters.

Criminal cases are heard by trial courts with general jurisdictions. Usually, a judge and jury are both present. It is the jury's responsibility to determine guilt and the judge's responsibility to determine the penalty, though in some states the jury may also decide the penalty. Unless a defendant is found "not guilty," any member of the prosecution or defense (whichever is the losing side) can appeal the case to a higher court. In some states, the case then goes to a special appellate court; in others it goes to the highest state court, often known as the state supreme court.



This county courthouse in Kansas (left) is a typical setting for a state trial court. Compare this to the courtroom of the Michigan Supreme Court (right). (Photo (a) courtesy of Ammodramus/Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of Steve & Christine/Wikimedia Commons)

## Corrections

The **corrections system**, more commonly known as the prison system, is charged with supervising individuals who have been arrested, convicted, and sentenced for a criminal offense. At the end of 2010, approximately seven million U.S. men and women were behind bars (BJS 2011d).

The U.S. incarceration rate has grown considerably in the last hundred years. In 2008, more than 1 in 100 U.S. adults were in jail or prison, the highest benchmark in our nation's history. And while the United States accounts for 5 percent of the global population, we have 25 percent of the world's inmates, the largest number of prisoners in the world (Liptak 2008b).

Prison is different from jail. A jail provides temporary confinement, usually while an individual awaits trial or parole. Prisons are facilities built for individuals serving sentences of more than a year. Whereas jails are small and local, prisons are large and run by either the state or the federal government.

Parole refers to a temporary release from prison or jail that requires supervision and the consent of officials. Parole is different from probation, which is supervised time used as an alternative to prison. Probation and parole can both follow a period of incarceration in prison, especially if the prison sentence is shortened.

## **Summary**

Crime is established by legal codes and upheld by the criminal justice system. In the United States, there are three branches of the justice system: police, courts, and corrections. Although crime rates increased throughout most of the twentieth century, they are now dropping.

## **Section Quiz**

### **Exercise:**

**Problem:** Which of the following is an example of corporate crime?

- a. Embezzlement
- b. Larceny
- c. Assault
- d. Burglary

---

**Solution:**  
**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Spousal abuse is an example of a \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. street crime
- b. corporate crime
- c. violent crime
- d. nonviolent crime

---

**Solution:**  
**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following situations best describes crime trends in the United States?

- a. Rates of violent and nonviolent crimes are decreasing.
- b. Rates of violent crimes are decreasing, but there are more nonviolent crimes now than ever before.
- c. Crime rates have skyrocketed since the 1970s due to lax corrections laws.
- d. Rates of street crime have gone up, but corporate crime has gone down.

---

**Solution:**  
**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What is a disadvantage of the *National Crime Victimization Survey* (NCVS)?

- a. The NCVS doesn't include demographic data, such as age or gender.
  - b. The NCVS may be unable to reach important groups, such as those without phones.
  - c. The NCVS doesn't address the relationship between the criminal and the victim.
  - d. The NCVS only includes information collected by police officers.
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Recall the crime statistics presented in this section. Do they surprise you? Are these statistics represented accurately in the media? Why, or why not?

**Further Research**

Is the U.S. criminal justice system confusing? You're not alone. Check out this handy flowchart from the Bureau of Justice Statistics:

[http://openstaxcollege.org/1/US\\_Criminal\\_Justice\\_BJS](http://openstaxcollege.org/1/US_Criminal_Justice_BJS)



How is crime data collected in the United States? Read about the methods of data collection and take the National Crime Victimization Survey. Visit [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Victimization\\_Survey](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Victimization_Survey).

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## **Glossary**

corporate crime

crime committed by white-collar workers in a business environment

corrections system

the system tasked with supervising individuals who have been arrested for, convicted of, or sentenced for criminal offenses

court

a system that has the authority to make decisions based on law

crime

a behavior that violates official law and is punishable through formal sanctions

criminal justice system

an organization that exists to enforce a legal code

hate crimes

attacks based on a person's race, religion, or other characteristics

legal codes

codes that maintain formal social control through laws

nonviolent crimes

crimes that involve the destruction or theft of property, but do not use force or the threat of force

police

a civil force in charge of regulating laws and public order at a federal, state, or community level

self-report study

a collection of data acquired using voluntary response methods, such as questionnaires or telephone interviews

street crime

crime committed by average people against other people or organizations, usually in public spaces

victimless crime

activities against the law, but that do not result in injury to any individual other than the person who engages in them

violent crimes

crimes based on the use of force or the threat of force

## Introduction to Race and Ethnicity

class="introduction"

Do you  
think race  
played a role  
in Trayvon  
Martin's  
death or in  
the public  
reaction to  
it? Do you  
think race  
had any  
influence on  
the initial  
decision not  
to arrest  
George  
Zimmerman,  
or on his  
later  
acquittal?  
(Photo  
courtesy of  
Ryan  
Vaarsi/flickr  
)



Trayvon Martin was a seventeen-year-old black teenager. On the evening of February 26, 2012, he was visiting with his father and his father's fiancée in the Sanford, Florida multi-ethnic gated community where his father's fiancée lived. Trayvon left her home on foot to buy a snack from a nearby convenience store. As he was returning, George Zimmerman, a white Hispanic male and the community's neighborhood watch program coordinator, noticed him. In light of a recent rash of break-ins, Zimmerman called the police to report a person acting suspiciously, which he had done on many other occasions. The 911 operator told Zimmerman not to follow the teen, but soon after Zimmerman and Martin had a physical confrontation. According to Zimmerman, Martin attacked him, and in the ensuing scuffle Martin was shot and killed (CNN Library 2014).

A public outcry followed Martin's death. There were allegations of **racial profiling**—the use by law enforcement of race alone to determine whether to stop and detain someone—a national discussion about “Stand Your Ground Laws,” and a failed lawsuit in which Zimmerman accused NBC of airing an edited version of the 911 call that made him appear racist. Zimmerman was not arrested until April 11, when he was charged with second-degree murder by special prosecutor Angela Corey. In the ensuing trial, he was found not guilty (CNN Library 2014).

The shooting, the public response, and the trial that followed offer a snapshot of the sociology of race. Do you think race played a role in

Martin's death or in the public reaction to it? Do you think race had any influence on the initial decision not to arrest Zimmerman, or on his later acquittal? Does society fear black men, leading to racial profiling at an institutional level? What about the role of the media? Was there a deliberate attempt to manipulate public opinion? If you were a member of the jury, would you have convicted George Zimmerman?

## **Glossary**

racial profiling

the use by law enforcement of race alone to determine whether to stop and detain someone

## Racial, Ethnic, and Minority Groups

- Understand the difference between race and ethnicity
- Define a majority group (dominant group)
- Define a minority group (subordinate group)

While many students first entering a sociology classroom are accustomed to conflating the terms “race,” “ethnicity,” and “minority group,” these three terms have distinct meanings for sociologists. The idea of race refers to superficial physical differences that a particular society considers significant, while ethnicity describes shared culture. And the term "minority groups" describe groups that are subordinate, or that lack power in society regardless of skin color or country of origin. For example, in modern U.S. history, the elderly might be considered a minority group due to a diminished status that results from popular prejudice and discrimination against them. Ten percent of nursing home staff admitted to physically abusing an elderly person in the past year, and 40 percent admitted to committing psychological abuse (World Health Organization 2011). In this chapter we focus on racial and ethnic minorities.

### What Is Race?

Historically, the concept of race has changed across cultures and eras, and has eventually become less connected with ancestral and familial ties, and more concerned with superficial physical characteristics. In the past, theorists have posited categories of race based on various geographic regions, ethnicities, skin colors, and more. Their labels for racial groups have connoted regions (Mongolia and the Caucus Mountains, for instance) or skin tones (black, white, yellow, and red, for example).

Social science organizations including the American Association of Anthropologists, the American Sociological Association, and the American Psychological Association have all taken an official position rejecting the biological explanations of race. Over time, the typology of race that developed during early racial science has fallen into disuse, and the **social construction of race** is a more sociological way of understanding racial categories. Research in this school of thought suggests that race is not



biologically identifiable and that previous racial categories were arbitrarily assigned, based on pseudoscience, and used to justify racist practices (Omi and Winant 1994; Graves 2003). When considering skin color, for example, the social construction of race perspective recognizes that the relative darkness or fairness of skin is an evolutionary adaptation to the available sunlight in different regions of the world. Contemporary conceptions of race, therefore, which tend to be based on socioeconomic assumptions, illuminate how far removed modern understanding of race is from biological qualities. In modern society, some people who consider themselves “white” actually have more melanin (a pigment that determines skin color) in their skin than other people who identify as “black.” Consider the case of the actress Rashida Jones. She is the daughter of a black man (Quincy Jones), and her best-known roles include Ann Perkins on *Parks and Recreation*, Karen Filippelli on *The Office*, and Zooey Rice in *I Love You Man*, none of whom are black characters. In some countries, such as Brazil, class is more important than skin color in determining racial categorization. People with high levels of melanin may consider themselves “white” if they enjoy a middle-class lifestyle. On the other hand, someone with low levels of melanin might be assigned the identity of “black” if he or she has little education or money.

The social construction of race is also reflected in the way names for racial categories change with changing times. It’s worth noting that race, in this sense, is also a system of labeling that provides a source of identity; specific labels fall in and out of favor during different social eras. For example, the category “negroid,” popular in the nineteenth century, evolved into the term “negro” by the 1960s, and then this term fell from use and was replaced with “African American.” This latter term was intended to celebrate the multiple identities that a black person might hold, but the word choice is a poor one: it lumps together a large variety of ethnic groups under an umbrella term while excluding others who could accurately be described by the label but who do not meet the spirit of the term. For example, actress Charlize Theron is a blonde-haired, blue-eyed “African American.” She was born in South Africa and later became a U.S. citizen. Is her identity that of an “African American” as most of us understand the term?

## **What Is Ethnicity?**

**Ethnicity** is a term that describes shared culture—the practices, values, and beliefs of a group. This culture might include shared language, religion, and traditions, among other commonalities. Like race, the term ethnicity is difficult to describe and its meaning has changed over time. And as with race, individuals may be identified or self-identify with ethnicities in complex, even contradictory, ways. For example, ethnic groups such as Irish, Italian American, Russian, Jewish, and Serbian might all be groups whose members are predominantly included in the “white” racial category. Conversely, the ethnic group British includes citizens from a multiplicity of racial backgrounds: black, white, Asian, and more, plus a variety of race combinations. These examples illustrate the complexity and overlap of these identifying terms. Ethnicity, like race, continues to be an identification method that individuals and institutions use today—whether through the census, affirmative action initiatives, nondiscrimination laws, or simply in personal day-to-day relations.

## What Are Minority Groups?

Sociologist Louis Wirth (1945) defined a **minority group** as “any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination.” The term minority connotes discrimination, and in its sociological use, the term **subordinate group** can be used interchangeably with the term minority, while the term **dominant group** is often substituted for the group that’s in the majority. These definitions correlate to the concept that the dominant group is that which holds the most power in a given society, while subordinate groups are those who lack power compared to the dominant group.

Note that being a numerical minority is not a characteristic of being a minority group; sometimes larger groups can be considered minority groups due to their lack of power. It is the lack of power that is the predominant characteristic of a minority, or subordinate group. For example, consider apartheid in South Africa, in which a numerical majority (the black inhabitants of the country) were exploited and oppressed by the white minority.

According to Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris (1958), a minority group is distinguished by five characteristics: (1) unequal treatment and less power over their lives, (2) distinguishing physical or cultural traits like skin color or language, (3) involuntary membership in the group, (4) awareness of subordination, and (5) high rate of in-group marriage. Additional examples of minority groups might include the LBGT community, religious practitioners whose faith is not widely practiced where they live, and people with disabilities.

**Scapegoat theory**, developed initially from Dollard's (1939) Frustration-Aggression theory, suggests that the dominant group will displace its unfocused aggression onto a subordinate group. History has shown us many examples of the scapegoating of a subordinate group. An example from the last century is the way Adolf Hitler was able to blame the Jewish population for Germany's social and economic problems. In the United States, recent immigrants have frequently been the scapegoat for the nation's—or an individual's—woes. Many states have enacted laws to disenfranchise immigrants; these laws are popular because they let the dominant group scapegoat a subordinate group.

## Summary

Race is fundamentally a social construct. Ethnicity is a term that describes shared culture and national origin. Minority groups are defined by their lack of power.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** The racial term “African American” can refer to:

- a. a black person living in the United States
- b. people whose ancestors came to the United States through the slave trade

- c. a white person who originated in Africa and now lives in the United States
- d. any of the above

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** What is the one defining feature of a minority group?

- a. Self-definition
- b. Numerical minority
- c. Lack of power
- d. Strong cultural identity

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Ethnicity describes shared:

- a. beliefs
- b. language
- c. religion
- d. any of the above

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following is an example of a numerical majority being treated as a subordinate group?

- a. Jewish people in Germany
- b. Creoles in New Orleans
- c. White people in Brazil
- d. Blacks under apartheid in South Africa

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Scapegoat theory shows that:

- a. subordinate groups blame dominant groups for their problems
- b. dominant groups blame subordinate groups for their problems
- c. some people are predisposed to prejudice
- d. all of the above

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Why do you think the term “minority” has persisted when the word “subordinate” is more descriptive?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

How do you describe your ethnicity? Do you include your family’s country of origin? Do you consider yourself multiethnic? How does your ethnicity compare to that of the people you spend most of your time with?

**Further Research**

Explore aspects of race and ethnicity at PBS’s site, “What Is Race?”: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/PBS\\_what\\_is\\_race](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/PBS_what_is_race)

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## Glossary

### dominant group

a group of people who have more power in a society than any of the subordinate groups

### ethnicity

shared culture, which may include heritage, language, religion, and more

### minority group

any group of people who are singled out from the others for differential and unequal treatment

### scapegoat theory

a theory that suggests that the dominant group will displace its unfocused aggression onto a subordinate group

### social construction of race

the school of thought that race is not biologically identifiable

### subordinate group

a group of people who have less power than the dominant group

## Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination

- Explain the difference between stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and racism
- Identify different types of discrimination
- View racial tension through a sociological lens

The terms stereotype, prejudice, discrimination, and racism are often used interchangeably in everyday conversation. Let us explore the differences between these concepts. **Stereotypes** are oversimplified generalizations about groups of people. Stereotypes can be based on race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation—almost any characteristic. They may be positive (usually about one's own group, such as when women suggest they are less likely to complain about physical pain) but are often negative (usually toward other groups, such as when members of a dominant racial group suggest that a subordinate racial group is stupid or lazy). In either case, the stereotype is a generalization that doesn't take individual differences into account.

Where do stereotypes come from? In fact new stereotypes are rarely created; rather, they are recycled from subordinate groups that have assimilated into society and are reused to describe newly subordinate groups. For example, many stereotypes that are currently used to characterize black people were used earlier in American history to characterize Irish and Eastern European immigrants.

## Prejudice and Racism

**Prejudice** refers to the beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes someone holds about a group. A prejudice is not based on experience; instead, it is a prejudgment, originating outside actual experience. A 1970 documentary called *Eye of the Storm* illustrates the way in which prejudice develops, by showing how defining one category of people as superior (children with blue eyes) results in prejudice against people who are not part of the favored category.



While prejudice is not necessarily specific to race, **racism** is a stronger type of prejudice used to justify the belief that one racial category is somehow superior or inferior to others; it is also a set of practices used by a racial majority to disadvantage a racial minority. The Ku Klux Klan is an example of a racist organization; its members' belief in white supremacy has encouraged over a century of hate crime and hate speech.

**Institutional racism** refers to the way in which racism is embedded in the fabric of society. For example, the disproportionate number of black men arrested, charged, and convicted of crimes may reflect racial profiling, a form of institutional racism.

**Colorism** is another kind of prejudice, in which someone believes one type of skin tone is superior or inferior to another within a racial group. Studies suggest that darker skinned African Americans experience more discrimination than lighter skinned African Americans (Herring, Keith, and Horton 2004; Klonoff and Landrine 2000). For example, if a white employer believes a black employee with a darker skin tone is less capable than a black employee with lighter skin tone, that is colorism. At least one study suggested the colorism affected racial socialization, with darker-skinned black male adolescents receiving more warnings about the danger of interacting with members of other racial groups than did lighter-skinned black male adolescents (Landor et al. 2013).

## **Discrimination**

While prejudice refers to biased thinking, **discrimination** consists of actions against a group of people. Discrimination can be based on age, religion, health, and other indicators; race-based laws against discrimination strive to address this set of social problems.

Discrimination based on race or ethnicity can take many forms, from unfair housing practices to biased hiring systems. Overt discrimination has long been part of U.S. history. In the late nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for business owners to hang signs that read, "Help Wanted: No Irish Need Apply." And southern Jim Crow laws, with their "Whites Only" signs, exemplified overt discrimination that is not tolerated today.

However, we cannot erase discrimination from our culture just by enacting laws to abolish it. Even if a magic pill managed to eradicate racism from each individual's psyche, society itself would maintain it. Sociologist Émile Durkheim calls racism a social fact, meaning that it does not require the action of individuals to continue. The reasons for this are complex and relate to the educational, criminal, economic, and political systems that exist in our society.

For example, when a newspaper identifies by race individuals accused of a crime, it may enhance stereotypes of a certain minority. Another example of racist practices is **racial steering**, in which real estate agents direct prospective homeowners toward or away from certain neighborhoods based on their race. Racist attitudes and beliefs are often more insidious and harder to pin down than specific racist practices.

Prejudice and discrimination can overlap and intersect in many ways. To illustrate, here are four examples of how prejudice and discrimination can occur. Unprejudiced nondiscriminators are open-minded, tolerant, and accepting individuals. Unprejudiced discriminators might be those who unthinkingly practice sexism in their workplace by not considering females for certain positions that have traditionally been held by men. Prejudiced nondiscriminators are those who hold racist beliefs but don't act on them, such as a racist store owner who serves minority customers. Prejudiced discriminators include those who actively make disparaging remarks about others or who perpetrate hate crimes.

Discrimination also manifests in different ways. The scenarios above are examples of individual discrimination, but other types exist. Institutional discrimination occurs when a societal system has developed with embedded disenfranchisement of a group, such as the U.S. military's historical nonacceptance of minority sexualities (the "don't ask, don't tell" policy reflected this norm).

Institutional discrimination can also include the promotion of a group's status, such in the case of **white privilege**, which is the benefits people receive simply by being part of the dominant group.

While most white people are willing to admit that nonwhite people live with a set of disadvantages due to the color of their skin, very few are willing to acknowledge the benefits they receive.

## **Racial Tensions in the United States**

The death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO on August 9, 2014 illustrates racial tensions in the United States as well as the overlap between prejudice, discrimination, and institutional racism. On that day, Brown, a young unarmed black man, was killed by a white police officer named Darren Wilson. During the incident, Wilson directed Brown and his friend to walk on the sidewalk instead of in the street. While eyewitness accounts vary, they agree that an altercation occurred between Wilson and Brown. Wilson's version has him shooting Brown in self-defense after Brown assaulted him, while Dorian Johnson, a friend of Brown also present at the time, claimed that Brown first ran away, then turned with his hands in the air to surrender, after which Johnson shot him repeatedly (Nobles and Bosman 2014). Three autopsies independently confirmed that Brown was shot six times (Lowery and Fears 2014).

The shooting focused attention on a number of race-related tensions in the United States. First, members of the predominantly black community viewed Brown's death as the result of a white police officer racially profiling a black man (Nobles and Bosman 2014). In the days after, it was revealed that only three members of the town's fifty-three-member police force were black (Nobles and Bosman 2014). The national dialogue shifted during the next few weeks, with some commentators pointing to a nationwide **sedimentation of racial inequality** and identifying **redlining** in Ferguson as a cause of the unbalanced racial composition in the community, in local political establishments, and in the police force (Bouie 2014). Redlining is the practice of routinely refusing mortgages for households and businesses located in predominately minority communities, while sedimentation of racial inequality describes the intergenerational impact of both practical and legalized racism that limits the abilities of black people to accumulate wealth.

Ferguson's racial imbalance may explain in part why, even though in 2010 only about 63 percent of its population was black, in 2013 blacks were detained in 86 percent of stops, 92 percent of searches, and 93 percent of arrests (Missouri Attorney General's Office 2014). In addition, **de facto segregation** in Ferguson's schools, a race-based wealth gap, urban sprawl, and a black unemployment rate three times that of the white unemployment rate worsened existing racial tensions in Ferguson while also reflecting nationwide racial inequalities (Bouie 2014).

## Multiple Identities



Golfer Tiger Woods has Chinese, Thai, African American, Native American, and Dutch heritage. Individuals with multiple ethnic backgrounds are

becoming more common.

(Photo courtesy of  
familymwr/flickr)

Prior to the twentieth century, racial intermarriage (referred to as miscegenation) was extremely rare, and in many places, illegal. In the later part of the twentieth century and in the twenty-first century, as [\[link\]](#) shows, attitudes have changed for the better. While the sexual subordination of slaves did result in children of mixed race, these children were usually considered black, and therefore, property. There was no concept of multiple racial identities with the possible exception of the Creole. Creole society developed in the port city of New Orleans, where a mixed-race culture grew from French and African inhabitants. Unlike in other parts of the country, “Creoles of color” had greater social, economic, and educational opportunities than most African Americans.

Increasingly during the modern era, the removal of miscegenation laws and a trend toward equal rights and legal protection against racism have steadily reduced the social stigma attached to racial exogamy (exogamy refers to marriage outside a person’s core social unit). It is now common for the children of racially mixed parents to acknowledge and celebrate their various ethnic identities. Golfer Tiger Woods, for instance, has Chinese, Thai, African American, Native American, and Dutch heritage; he jokingly refers to his ethnicity as “Cablinasian,” a term he coined to combine several of his ethnic backgrounds. While this is the trend, it is not yet evident in all aspects of our society. For example, the U.S. Census only recently added additional categories for people to identify themselves, such as non-white Hispanic. A growing number of people chose multiple races to describe themselves on the 2010 Census, paving the way for the 2020 Census to provide yet more choices.

**Note:**

The Confederate Flag vs. the First Amendment



To some, the Confederate flag is a symbol of pride in Southern history. To others, it is a grim reminder of a degrading period of the United States' past. (Photo courtesy of Eyeliam/flickr)

In January 2006, two girls walked into Burleson High School in Texas carrying purses that displayed large images of Confederate flags. School administrators told the girls that they were in violation of the dress code, which prohibited apparel with inappropriate symbolism or clothing that discriminated based on race. To stay in school, they'd have to have someone pick up their purses or leave them in the office. The girls chose to go home for the day but then challenged the school's decision, appealing first to the principal, then to the district superintendent, then to the U.S. District Court, and finally to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Why did the school ban the purses, and why did it stand behind that ban, even when being sued? Why did the girls, identified anonymously in court documents as A.M. and A.T., pursue such strong legal measures for their right to carry the purses? The issue, of course, is not the purses: it is the Confederate flag that adorns them. The parties in this case join a long line of people and institutions that have fought for their right to display it, saying such a display is covered by the First Amendment's guarantee of

free speech. In the end, the court sided with the district and noted that the Confederate flag carried symbolism significant enough to disrupt normal school activities.

While many young people in the United States like to believe that racism is mostly in the country's past, this case illustrates how racism and discrimination are quite alive today. If the Confederate flag is synonymous with slavery, is there any place for its display in modern society? Those who fight for their right to display the flag say such a display should be covered by the First Amendment: the right to free speech. But others say the flag is equivalent to hate speech. Do you think that displaying the Confederate flag should be considered free speech or hate speech?

## Summary

Stereotypes are oversimplified ideas about groups of people. Prejudice refers to thoughts and feelings, while discrimination refers to actions. Racism refers to the belief that one race is inherently superior or inferior to other races.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Stereotypes can be based on:

- a. race
- b. ethnicity
- c. gender
- d. all of the above

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** What is discrimination?

- a. Biased thoughts against an individual or group
  - b. Biased actions against an individual or group
  - c. Belief that a race different from yours is inferior
  - d. Another word for stereotyping
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following is the best explanation of racism as a social fact?

- a. It needs to be eradicated by laws.
  - b. It is like a magic pill.
  - c. It does not need the actions of individuals to continue.
  - d. None of the above
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Short Answer****Exercise:**



**Problem:**

How do redlining and racial steering contribute to institutionalized racism?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Give an example of stereotyping that you see in everyday life. Explain what would need to happen for this to be eliminated.

**Further Research**

How far should First Amendment rights extend? Read more about the subject at the First Amendment Center:

[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/first\\_amendment\\_center](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/first_amendment_center)

Learn more about institutional racism at [https://openstax.org/l/SPL\\_Center](https://openstax.org/l/SPL_Center)

Learn more about how prejudice develops by watching the short documentary “Eye of the Storm”: [https://openstax.org/l/Eye\\_Storm](https://openstax.org/l/Eye_Storm)

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## **Glossary**

### **colorism**

the belief that one type of skin tone is superior or inferior to another within a racial group

### **discrimination**

prejudiced action against a group of people

### **institutional racism**

racism embedded in social institutions

### **prejudice**

biased thought based on flawed assumptions about a group of people

### **racial steering**

the act of real estate agents directing prospective homeowners toward or away from certain neighborhoods based on their race

### **racism**

a set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices that are used to justify the belief that one racial category is somehow superior or inferior to others

### **redlining**

the practice of routinely refusing mortgages for households and business located in predominately minority communities

### **sedimentation of racial inequality**

the intergenerational impact of de facto and de jure racism that limits the abilities of black people to accumulate wealth

### **stereotypes**

oversimplified ideas about groups of people

### **white privilege**

the benefits people receive simply by being part of the dominant group

## Theories of Race and Ethnicity

- Describe how major sociological perspectives view race and ethnicity
- Identify examples of culture of prejudice

## Theoretical Perspectives

We can examine issues of race and ethnicity through three major sociological perspectives: functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. As you read through these theories, ask yourself which one makes the most sense and why. Do we need more than one theory to explain racism, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination?

### Functionalism

In the view of functionalism, racial and ethnic inequalities must have served an important function in order to exist as long as they have. This concept, of course, is problematic. How can racism and discrimination contribute positively to society? A functionalist might look at “functions” and “dysfunctions” caused by racial inequality. Nash (1964) focused his argument on the way racism is functional for the dominant group, for example, suggesting that racism morally justifies a racially unequal society. Consider the way slave owners justified slavery in the antebellum South, by suggesting black people were fundamentally inferior to white and preferred slavery to freedom.

Another way to apply the functionalist perspective to racism is to discuss the way racism can contribute positively to the functioning of society by strengthening bonds between in-group members through the ostracism of out-group members. Consider how a community might increase solidarity by refusing to allow outsiders access. On the other hand, Rose (1951) suggested that dysfunctions associated with racism include the failure to take advantage of talent in the subjugated group, and that society must divert from other purposes the time and effort needed to maintain artificially constructed racial boundaries. Consider how much money, time,

and effort went toward maintaining separate and unequal educational systems prior to the civil rights movement.

## **Conflict Theory**

Conflict theories are often applied to inequalities of gender, social class, education, race, and ethnicity. A conflict theory perspective of U.S. history would examine the numerous past and current struggles between the white ruling class and racial and ethnic minorities, noting specific conflicts that have arisen when the dominant group perceived a threat from the minority group. In the late nineteenth century, the rising power of black Americans after the Civil War resulted in draconian Jim Crow laws that severely limited black political and social power. For example, Vivien Thomas (1910–1985), the black surgical technician who helped develop the groundbreaking surgical technique that saves the lives of “blue babies” was classified as a janitor for many years, and paid as such, despite the fact that he was conducting complicated surgical experiments. The years since the Civil War have showed a pattern of attempted disenfranchisement, with gerrymandering and voter suppression efforts aimed at predominantly minority neighborhoods.

Feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) developed **intersection theory**, which suggests we cannot separate the effects of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other attributes. When we examine race and how it can bring us both advantages and disadvantages, it is important to acknowledge that the way we experience race is shaped, for example, by our gender and class. Multiple layers of disadvantage intersect to create the way we experience race. For example, if we want to understand prejudice, we must understand that the prejudice focused on a white woman because of her gender is very different from the layered prejudice focused on a poor Asian woman, who is affected by stereotypes related to being poor, being a woman, and her ethnic status.

## **Interactionism**

For symbolic interactionists, race and ethnicity provide strong symbols as sources of identity. In fact, some interactionists propose that the symbols of race, not race itself, are what lead to racism. Famed Interactionist Herbert Blumer (1958) suggested that racial prejudice is formed through interactions between members of the dominant group: Without these interactions, individuals in the dominant group would not hold racist views. These interactions contribute to an abstract picture of the subordinate group that allows the dominant group to support its view of the subordinate group, and thus maintains the status quo. An example of this might be an individual whose beliefs about a particular group are based on images conveyed in popular media, and those are unquestionably believed because the individual has never personally met a member of that group. Another way to apply the interactionist perspective is to look at how people define their races and the race of others. As we discussed in relation to the social construction of race, since some people who claim a white identity have a greater amount of skin pigmentation than some people who claim a black identity, how did they come to define themselves as black or white?

## **Culture of Prejudice**

**Culture of prejudice** refers to the theory that prejudice is embedded in our culture. We grow up surrounded by images of stereotypes and casual expressions of racism and prejudice. Consider the casually racist imagery on grocery store shelves or the stereotypes that fill popular movies and advertisements. It is easy to see how someone living in the Northeastern United States, who may know no Mexican Americans personally, might gain a stereotyped impression from such sources as Speedy Gonzalez or Taco Bell's talking Chihuahua. Because we are all exposed to these images and thoughts, it is impossible to know to what extent they have influenced our thought processes.

## **Summary**

Functionalist views of race study the role dominant and subordinate groups play to create a stable social structure. Conflict theorists examine power disparities and struggles between various racial and ethnic groups.

Interactionists see race and ethnicity as important sources of individual identity and social symbolism. The concept of culture of prejudice recognizes that all people are subject to stereotypes that are ingrained in their culture.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

As a Caucasian in the United States, being reasonably sure that you will be dealing with authority figures of the same race as you is a result of:

- a. intersection theory
- b. conflict theory
- c. white privilege
- d. scapegoating theory

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

C

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Speedy Gonzalez is an example of:

- a. intersection theory
- b. stereotyping
- c. interactionist view
- d. culture of prejudice

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer



B

## Short Answer

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Give three examples of white privilege. Do you know people who have experienced this? From what perspective?

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

What is the worst example of culture of prejudice you can think of? What are your reasons for thinking it is the worst?

## Further Research

Do you know someone who practices white privilege? Do you practice it? Explore the concept with this checklist:

[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/white\\_privilege\\_checklist](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/white_privilege_checklist) to see how much of it holds true for you or others.

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(<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0007/000733/073342eo.pdf>).

## **Glossary**

culture of prejudice

the theory that prejudice is embedded in our culture

intersection theory

theory that suggests we cannot separate the effects of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other attributes

## Intergroup Relationships

- Explain different intergroup relations in terms of their relative levels of tolerance
- Give historical and/or contemporary examples of each type of intergroup relation

Intergroup relations (relationships between different groups of people) range along a spectrum between tolerance and intolerance. The most tolerant form of intergroup relations is pluralism, in which no distinction is made between minority and majority groups, but instead there's equal standing. At the other end of the continuum are amalgamation, expulsion, and even genocide—stark examples of intolerant intergroup relations.

## Genocide

**Genocide**, the deliberate annihilation of a targeted (usually subordinate) group, is the most toxic intergroup relationship. Historically, we can see that genocide has included both the intent to exterminate a group and the function of exterminating of a group, intentional or not.

Possibly the most well-known case of genocide is Hitler's attempt to exterminate the Jewish people in the first part of the twentieth century. Also known as the Holocaust, the explicit goal of Hitler's "Final Solution" was the eradication of European Jewry, as well as the destruction of other minority groups such as Catholics, people with disabilities, and homosexuals. With forced emigration, concentration camps, and mass executions in gas chambers, Hitler's Nazi regime was responsible for the deaths of 12 million people, 6 million of whom were Jewish. Hitler's intent was clear, and the high Jewish death toll certainly indicates that Hitler and his regime committed genocide. But how do we understand genocide that is not so overt and deliberate?

The treatment of aboriginal Australians is also an example of genocide committed against indigenous people. Historical accounts suggest that between 1824 and 1908, white settlers killed more than 10,000 native aborigines in Tasmania and Australia (Tatz 2006). Another example is the

European colonization of North America. Some historians estimate that Native American populations dwindled from approximately 12 million people in the year 1500 to barely 237,000 by the year 1900 (Lewy 2004). European settlers coerced American Indians off their own lands, often causing thousands of deaths in forced removals, such as occurred in the Cherokee or Potawatomi Trail of Tears. Settlers also enslaved Native Americans and forced them to give up their religious and cultural practices. But the major cause of Native American death was neither slavery nor war nor forced removal: it was the introduction of European diseases and Indians' lack of immunity to them. Smallpox, diphtheria, and measles flourished among indigenous American tribes who had no exposure to the diseases and no ability to fight them. Quite simply, these diseases decimated the tribes. How planned this genocide was remains a topic of contention. Some argue that the spread of disease was an unintended effect of conquest, while others believe it was intentional citing rumors of smallpox-infected blankets being distributed as "gifts" to tribes.

Genocide is not a just a historical concept; it is practiced today. Recently, ethnic and geographic conflicts in the Darfur region of Sudan have led to hundreds of thousands of deaths. As part of an ongoing land conflict, the Sudanese government and their state-sponsored Janjaweed militia have led a campaign of killing, forced displacement, and systematic rape of Darfuri people. Although a treaty was signed in 2011, the peace is fragile.

## **Expulsion**

**Expulsion** refers to a subordinate group being forced, by a dominant group, to leave a certain area or country. As seen in the examples of the Trail of Tears and the Holocaust, expulsion can be a factor in genocide. However, it can also stand on its own as a destructive group interaction. Expulsion has often occurred historically with an ethnic or racial basis. In the United States, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 in 1942, after the Japanese government's attack on Pearl Harbor. The Order authorized the establishment of internment camps for anyone with as little as one-eighth Japanese ancestry (i.e., one great-grandparent who was Japanese). Over 120,000 legal Japanese residents and Japanese U.S. citizens, many of them children, were held in these camps for up to four

years, despite the fact that there was never any evidence of collusion or espionage. (In fact, many Japanese Americans continued to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States by serving in the U.S. military during the War.) In the 1990s, the U.S. executive branch issued a formal apology for this expulsion; reparation efforts continue today.

## Segregation

**Segregation** refers to the physical separation of two groups, particularly in residence, but also in workplace and social functions. It is important to distinguish between *de jure* segregation (segregation that is enforced by law) and *de facto* segregation (segregation that occurs without laws but because of other factors). A stark example of *de jure* segregation is the apartheid movement of South Africa, which existed from 1948 to 1994. Under apartheid, black South Africans were stripped of their civil rights and forcibly relocated to areas that segregated them physically from their white compatriots. Only after decades of degradation, violent uprisings, and international advocacy was apartheid finally abolished.

*De jure* segregation occurred in the United States for many years after the Civil War. During this time, many former Confederate states passed Jim Crow laws that required segregated facilities for blacks and whites. These laws were codified in 1896's landmark Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which stated that "separate but equal" facilities were constitutional. For the next five decades, blacks were subjected to legalized discrimination, forced to live, work, and go to school in separate—but *unequal*—facilities. It wasn't until 1954 and the *Brown v. Board of Education* case that the Supreme Court declared that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," thus ending *de jure* segregation in the United States.



In the “Jim Crow” South, it was legal to have “separate but equal” facilities for blacks and whites. (Photo courtesy of Library of Congress/Wikimedia Commons)

*De facto* segregation, however, cannot be abolished by any court mandate. Segregation is still alive and well in the United States, with different racial or ethnic groups often segregated by neighborhood, borough, or parish. Sociologists use segregation indices to measure racial segregation of different races in different areas. The indices employ a scale from zero to 100, where zero is the most integrated and 100 is the least. In the New York metropolitan area, for instance, the black-white segregation index was seventy-nine for the years 2005–2009. This means that 79 percent of either blacks or whites would have to move in order for each neighborhood to have the same racial balance as the whole metro region (Population Studies Center 2010).

## Pluralism

**Pluralism** is represented by the ideal of the United States as a “salad bowl”: a great mixture of different cultures where each culture retains its own identity and yet adds to the flavor of the whole. True pluralism is characterized by mutual respect on the part of all cultures, both dominant

and subordinate, creating a multicultural environment of acceptance. In reality, true pluralism is a difficult goal to reach. In the United States, the mutual respect required by pluralism is often missing, and the nation's past pluralist model of a melting pot posits a society where cultural differences aren't embraced as much as erased.

## **Assimilation**

**Assimilation** describes the process by which a minority individual or group gives up its own identity by taking on the characteristics of the dominant culture. In the United States, which has a history of welcoming and absorbing immigrants from different lands, assimilation has been a function of immigration.



For many immigrants to the United States, the Statue of Liberty is a symbol of freedom and a new life. Unfortunately, they often encounter

prejudice and  
discrimination. (Photo  
courtesy of Mark  
Heard/flickr)

Most people in the United States have immigrant ancestors. In relatively recent history, between 1890 and 1920, the United States became home to around 24 million immigrants. In the decades since then, further waves of immigrants have come to these shores and have eventually been absorbed into U.S. culture, sometimes after facing extended periods of prejudice and discrimination. Assimilation may lead to the loss of the minority group's cultural identity as they become absorbed into the dominant culture, but assimilation has minimal to no impact on the majority group's cultural identity.

Some groups may keep only symbolic gestures of their original ethnicity. For instance, many Irish Americans may celebrate Saint Patrick's Day, many Hindu Americans enjoy a Diwali festival, and many Mexican Americans may celebrate *Cinco de Mayo* (a May 5 acknowledgment of Mexico's victory at the 1862 Battle of Puebla). However, for the rest of the year, other aspects of their originating culture may be forgotten.

Assimilation is antithetical to the "salad bowl" created by pluralism; rather than maintaining their own cultural flavor, subordinate cultures give up their own traditions in order to conform to their new environment. Sociologists measure the degree to which immigrants have assimilated to a new culture with four benchmarks: socioeconomic status, spatial concentration, language assimilation, and intermarriage. When faced with racial and ethnic discrimination, it can be difficult for new immigrants to fully assimilate. Language assimilation, in particular, can be a formidable barrier, limiting employment and educational options and therefore constraining growth in socioeconomic status.

## **Amalgamation**



**Amalgamation** is the process by which a minority group and a majority group combine to form a new group. Amalgamation creates the classic “melting pot” analogy; unlike the “salad bowl,” in which each culture retains its individuality, the “melting pot” ideal sees the combination of cultures that results in a new culture entirely.

Amalgamation, also known as miscegenation, is achieved through intermarriage between races. In the United States, antimiscegenation laws flourished in the South during the Jim Crow era. It wasn’t until 1967’s *Loving v. Virginia* that the last antimiscegenation law was struck from the books, making these laws unconstitutional.

## Summary

Intergroup relations range from a tolerant approach of pluralism to intolerance as severe as genocide. In pluralism, groups retain their own identity. In assimilation, groups conform to the identity of the dominant group. In amalgamation, groups combine to form a new group identity.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Which intergroup relation displays the least tolerance?

- a. Segregation
- b. Assimilation
- c. Genocide
- d. Expulsion

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

### Exercise:

**Problem:** What doctrine justified legal segregation in the South?

- a. Jim Crow
- b. *Plessy v. Ferguson*
- c. *De jure*
- d. Separate but equal

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What intergroup relationship is represented by the “salad bowl” metaphor?

- a. Assimilation
- b. Pluralism
- c. Amalgamation
- d. Segregation

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Amalgamation is represented by the \_\_\_\_\_ metaphor.

- a. melting pot
- b. Statue of Liberty

- c. salad bowl
  - d. separate but equal
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

## Short Answer

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Do you believe immigration laws should foster an approach of pluralism, assimilation, or amalgamation? Which perspective do you think is most supported by current U.S. immigration policies?

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which intergroup relation do you think is the most beneficial to the subordinate group? To society as a whole? Why?

## Further Research

So you think you know your own assumptions? Check and find out with the Implicit Association Test:

[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/implicit\\_association\\_test](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/implicit_association_test)

What do you know about the treatment of Australia's aboriginal population? Find out more by viewing the feature-length documentary *Our Generation*: [https://openstax.org/l/Our\\_Gen](https://openstax.org/l/Our_Gen)

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## **Glossary**

### **amalgamation**

the process by which a minority group and a majority group combine to form a new group

### **assimilation**

the process by which a minority individual or group takes on the characteristics of the dominant culture

### **expulsion**

the act of a dominant group forcing a subordinate group to leave a certain area or even the country

genocide

the deliberate annihilation of a targeted (usually subordinate) group

pluralism

the ideal of the United States as a “salad bowl:” a mixture of different cultures where each culture retains its own identity and yet adds to the “flavor” of the whole

segregation

the physical separation of two groups, particularly in residence, but also in workplace and social functions

## Race and Ethnicity in the United States

- Compare and contrast the different experiences of various ethnic groups in the United States
- Apply theories of intergroup relations, race, and ethnicity to different subordinate groups

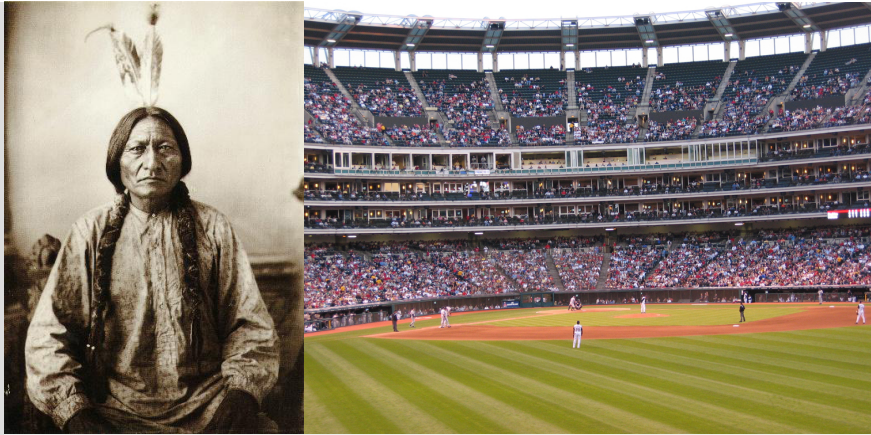
When colonists came to the New World, they found a land that did not need “discovering” since it was already occupied. While the first wave of immigrants came from Western Europe, eventually the bulk of people entering North America were from Northern Europe, then Eastern Europe, then Latin America and Asia. And let us not forget the forced immigration of African slaves. Most of these groups underwent a period of disenfranchisement in which they were relegated to the bottom of the social hierarchy before they managed (for those who could) to achieve social mobility. Today, our society is multicultural, although the extent to which this multiculturalism is embraced varies, and the many manifestations of multiculturalism carry significant political repercussions. The sections below will describe how several groups became part of U.S. society, discuss the history of intergroup relations for each faction, and assess each group’s status today.

### Native Americans

The only nonimmigrant ethnic group in the United States, Native Americans once numbered in the millions but by 2010 made up only 0.9 percent of U.S. populace; see above (U.S. Census 2010). Currently, about 2.9 million people identify themselves as Native American alone, while an additional 2.3 million identify them as Native American mixed with another ethnic group (Norris, Vines, and Hoeffel 2012).

**Note:**

Sports Teams with Native American Names



Many Native Americans (and others) believe sports teams with names like the Indians, Braves, and Warriors perpetuate unwelcome stereotypes. (Photo (a) courtesy of public domain/Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of Chris Brown/flickr)

The sports world abounds with team names like the Indians, the Warriors, the Braves, and even the Savages and Redskins. These names arise from historically prejudiced views of Native Americans as fierce, brave, and strong savages: attributes that would be beneficial to a sports team, but are not necessarily beneficial to people in the United States who should be seen as more than just fierce savages.

Since the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) has been campaigning against the use of such mascots, asserting that the “warrior savage myth . . . reinforces the racist view that Indians are uncivilized and uneducated and it has been used to justify policies of forced assimilation and destruction of Indian culture” (NCAI Resolution #TUL-05-087 2005). The campaign has met with only limited success. While some teams have changed their names, hundreds of professional, college, and K–12 school teams still have names derived from this stereotype. Another group, American Indian Cultural Support (AICS), is especially concerned with the use of such names at K–12 schools, influencing children when they should be gaining a fuller and

more realistic understanding of Native Americans than such stereotypes supply.

What do you think about such names? Should they be allowed or banned? What argument would a symbolic interactionist make on this topic?

## **How and Why They Came**

The earliest immigrants to America arrived millennia before European immigrants. Dates of the migration are debated with estimates ranging from between 45,000 and 12,000 BCE. It is thought that early Indians migrated to this new land in search of big game to hunt, which they found in huge herds of grazing herbivores in the Americas. Over the centuries and then the millennia, Native American culture blossomed into an intricate web of hundreds of interconnected tribes, each with its own customs, traditions, languages, and religions.

## **History of Intergroup Relations**

Native American culture prior to European settlement is referred to as Pre-Columbian: that is, prior to the coming of Christopher Columbus in 1492. Mistakenly believing that he had landed in the East Indies, Columbus named the indigenous people “Indians,” a name that has persisted for centuries despite being a geographical misnomer and one used to blanket 500 distinct groups who each have their own languages and traditions.

The history of intergroup relations between European colonists and Native Americans is a brutal one. As discussed in the section on genocide, the effect of European settlement of the Americas was to nearly destroy the indigenous population. And although Native Americans’ lack of immunity to European diseases caused the most deaths, overt mistreatment of Native Americans by Europeans was devastating as well.

From the first Spanish colonists to the French, English, and Dutch who followed, European settlers took what land they wanted and expanded



across the continent at will. If indigenous people tried to retain their stewardship of the land, Europeans fought them off with superior weapons. A key element of this issue is the indigenous view of land and land ownership. Most tribes considered the earth a living entity whose resources they were stewards of, the concepts of land ownership and conquest didn't exist in Native American society. Europeans' domination of the Americas was indeed a conquest; one scholar points out that Native Americans are the only minority group in the United States whose subordination occurred purely through conquest by the dominant group (Marger 1993).

After the establishment of the United States government, discrimination against Native Americans was codified and formalized in a series of laws intended to subjugate them and keep them from gaining any power. Some of the most impactful laws are as follows:

- The Indian Removal Act of 1830 forced the relocation of any native tribes east of the Mississippi River to lands west of the river.
- The Indian Appropriation Acts funded further removals and declared that no Indian tribe could be recognized as an independent nation, tribe, or power with which the U.S. government would have to make treaties. This made it even easier for the U.S. government to take land it wanted.
- The Dawes Act of 1887 reversed the policy of isolating Native Americans on reservations, instead forcing them onto individual properties that were intermingled with white settlers, thereby reducing their capacity for power as a group.

Native American culture was further eroded by the establishment of Indian boarding schools in the late nineteenth century. These schools, run by both Christian missionaries and the United States government, had the express purpose of “civilizing” Native American children and assimilating them into white society. The boarding schools were located off-reservation to ensure that children were separated from their families and culture. Schools forced children to cut their hair, speak English, and practice Christianity. Physical and sexual abuses were rampant for decades; only in 1987 did the Bureau of Indian Affairs issue a policy on sexual abuse in boarding schools. Some scholars argue that many of the problems that Native Americans face

today result from almost a century of mistreatment at these boarding schools.

## **Current Status**

The eradication of Native American culture continued until the 1960s, when Native Americans were able to participate in and benefit from the civil rights movement. The Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 guaranteed Indian tribes most of the rights of the United States Bill of Rights. New laws like the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975 and the Education Assistance Act of the same year recognized tribal governments and gave them more power. Indian boarding schools have dwindled to only a few, and Native American cultural groups are striving to preserve and maintain old traditions to keep them from being lost forever.

However, Native Americans (some of whom now wished to be called American Indians so as to avoid the “savage” connotations of the term “native”) still suffer the effects of centuries of degradation. Long-term poverty, inadequate education, cultural dislocation, and high rates of unemployment contribute to Native American populations falling to the bottom of the economic spectrum. Native Americans also suffer disproportionately with lower life expectancies than most groups in the United States.

## **African Americans**

As discussed in the section on race, the term African American can be a misnomer for many individuals. Many people with dark skin may have their more recent roots in Europe or the Caribbean, seeing themselves as Dominican American or Dutch American. Further, actual immigrants from Africa may feel that they have more of a claim to the term African American than those who are many generations removed from ancestors who originally came to this country. This section will focus on the experience of the slaves who were transported from Africa to the United

States, and their progeny. Currently, the U.S. Census Bureau (2014) estimates that 13.2 percent of the United States' population is black.

## **How and Why They Came**

If Native Americans are the only minority group whose subordinate status occurred by conquest, African Americans are the exemplar minority group in the United States whose ancestors did not come here by choice. A Dutch sea captain brought the first Africans to the Virginia colony of Jamestown in 1619 and sold them as indentured servants. This was not an uncommon practice for either blacks or whites, and indentured servants were in high demand. For the next century, black and white indentured servants worked side by side. But the growing agricultural economy demanded greater and cheaper labor, and by 1705, Virginia passed the slave codes declaring that any foreign-born non-Christian could be a slave, and that slaves were considered property.

The next 150 years saw the rise of U.S. slavery, with black Africans being kidnapped from their own lands and shipped to the New World on the trans-Atlantic journey known as the Middle Passage. Once in the Americas, the black population grew until U.S.-born blacks outnumbered those born in Africa. But colonial (and later, U.S.) slave codes declared that the child of a slave was a slave, so the slave class was created. By 1808, the slave trade was internal in the United States, with slaves being bought and sold across state lines like livestock.

## **History of Intergroup Relations**

There is no starker illustration of the dominant-subordinate group relationship than that of slavery. In order to justify their severely discriminatory behavior, slaveholders and their supporters had to view blacks as innately inferior. Slaves were denied even the most basic rights of citizenship, a crucial factor for slaveholders and their supporters. Slavery poses an excellent example of conflict theory's perspective on race

relations; the dominant group needed complete control over the subordinate group in order to maintain its power. Whippings, executions, rapes, denial of schooling and health care were all permissible and widely practiced.

Slavery eventually became an issue over which the nation divided into geographically and ideologically distinct factions, leading to the Civil War. And while the abolition of slavery on moral grounds was certainly a catalyst to war, it was not the only driving force. Students of U.S. history will know that the institution of slavery was crucial to the Southern economy, whose production of crops like rice, cotton, and tobacco relied on the virtually limitless and cheap labor that slavery provided. In contrast, the North didn't benefit economically from slavery, resulting in an economic disparity tied to racial/political issues.

A century later, the civil rights movement was characterized by boycotts, marches, sit-ins, and freedom rides: demonstrations by a subordinate group that would no longer willingly submit to domination. The major blow to America's formally institutionalized racism was the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This Act, which is still followed today, banned discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Some sociologists, however, would argue that institutionalized racism persists.

## **Current Status**

Although government-sponsored, formalized discrimination against African Americans has been outlawed, true equality does not yet exist. The National Urban League's *2011 Equality Index* reports that blacks' overall equality level with whites has dropped in the past year, from 71.5 percent to 71.1 percent in 2010. The *Index*, which has been published since 2005, notes a growing trend of increased inequality with whites, especially in the areas of unemployment, insurance coverage, and incarceration. Blacks also trail whites considerably in the areas of economics, health, and education.

To what degree do racism and prejudice contribute to this continued inequality? The answer is complex. 2008 saw the election of this country's first African American president: Barack Hussein Obama. Despite being

popularly identified as black, we should note that President Obama is of a mixed background that is equally white, and although all presidents have been publicly mocked at times (Gerald Ford was depicted as a klutz, Bill Clinton as someone who could not control his libido), a startling percentage of the critiques of Obama have been based on his race. The most blatant of these was the controversy over his birth certificate, where the “birther” movement questioned his citizenship and right to hold office. Although blacks have come a long way from slavery, the echoes of centuries of disempowerment are still evident.

## **Asian Americans**

Like many groups this section discusses, Asian Americans represent a great diversity of cultures and backgrounds. The experience of a Japanese American whose family has been in the United States for three generations will be drastically different from a Laotian American who has only been in the United States for a few years. This section primarily discusses Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese immigrants and shows the differences between their experiences. The most recent estimate from the U.S. Census Bureau (2014) suggest about 5.3 percent of the population identify themselves as Asian.

### **How and Why They Came**

The national and ethnic diversity of Asian American immigration history is reflected in the variety of their experiences in joining U.S. society. Asian immigrants have come to the United States in waves, at different times, and for different reasons.

The first Asian immigrants to come to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century were Chinese. These immigrants were primarily men whose intention was to work for several years in order to earn incomes to support their families in China. Their main destination was the American West, where the Gold Rush was drawing people with its lure of abundant money. The construction of the Transcontinental Railroad was underway at

this time, and the Central Pacific section hired thousands of migrant Chinese men to complete the laying of rails across the rugged Sierra Nevada mountain range. Chinese men also engaged in other manual labor like mining and agricultural work. The work was grueling and underpaid, but like many immigrants, they persevered.

Japanese immigration began in the 1880s, on the heels of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Many Japanese immigrants came to Hawaii to participate in the sugar industry; others came to the mainland, especially to California. Unlike the Chinese, however, the Japanese had a strong government that negotiated with the U.S. government to ensure the well-being of their immigrants. Japanese men were able to bring their wives and families to the United States, and were thus able to produce second- and third-generation Japanese Americans more quickly than their Chinese counterparts.

The most recent large-scale Asian immigration came from Korea and Vietnam and largely took place during the second half of the twentieth century. While Korean immigration has been fairly gradual, Vietnamese immigration occurred primarily post-1975, after the fall of Saigon and the establishment of restrictive communist policies in Vietnam. Whereas many Asian immigrants came to the United States to seek better economic opportunities, Vietnamese immigrants came as political refugees, seeking asylum from harsh conditions in their homeland. The Refugee Act of 1980 helped them to find a place to settle in the United States.



Thirty-five  
Vietnamese  
refugees wait to  
be taken aboard  
the amphibious  
USS *Blue Ridge*  
(LCC-19). They  
are being  
rescued from a  
thirty-five-foot  
fishing boat 350  
miles northeast  
of Cam Ranh  
Bay, Vietnam,  
after spending  
eight days at  
sea. (Photo  
courtesy of U.S.  
Navy/Wikimedi  
a Commons)

## History of Intergroup Relations

Chinese immigration came to an abrupt end with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This act was a result of anti-Chinese sentiment burgeoned by a depressed economy and loss of jobs. White workers blamed Chinese migrants for taking jobs, and the passage of the Act meant the number of Chinese workers decreased. Chinese men did not have the funds to return to China or to bring their families to the United States, so they remained physically and culturally segregated in the Chinatowns of large cities. Later legislation, the Immigration Act of 1924, further curtailed Chinese immigration. The Act included the race-based National Origins Act, which was aimed at keeping U.S. ethnic stock as undiluted as possible by reducing

“undesirable” immigrants. It was not until after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that Chinese immigration again increased, and many Chinese families were reunited.

Although Japanese Americans have deep, long-reaching roots in the United States, their history here has not always been smooth. The California Alien Land Law of 1913 was aimed at them and other Asian immigrants, and it prohibited aliens from owning land. An even uglier action was the Japanese internment camps of World War II, discussed earlier as an illustration of expulsion.

## **Current Status**

Asian Americans certainly have been subject to their share of racial prejudice, despite the seemingly positive stereotype as the model minority. The **model minority** stereotype is applied to a minority group that is seen as reaching significant educational, professional, and socioeconomic levels without challenging the existing establishment.

This stereotype is typically applied to Asian groups in the United States, and it can result in unrealistic expectations, by putting a stigma on members of this group that do not meet the expectations. Stereotyping all Asians as smart and capable can also lead to a lack of much-needed government assistance and to educational and professional discrimination.

## **Hispanic Americans**

Hispanic Americans have a wide range of backgrounds and nationalities. The segment of the U.S. population that self-identifies as Hispanic in 2013 was recently estimated at 17.1 percent of the total (U.S. Census Bureau 2014). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, about 75 percent of the respondents who identify as Hispanic report being of Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban origin. Of the total Hispanic group, 60 percent reported as Mexican, 44 percent reported as Cuban, and 9 percent reported as Puerto Rican. Remember that the U.S. Census allows people to report as being more than one ethnicity.



Not only are there wide differences among the different origins that make up the Hispanic American population, but there are also different names for the group itself. The 2010 U.S. Census states that “Hispanic” or “Latino” refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.” There have been some disagreements over whether Hispanic or Latino is the correct term for a group this diverse, and whether it would be better for people to refer to themselves as being of their origin specifically, for example, Mexican American or Dominican American. This section will compare the experiences of Mexican Americans and Cuban Americans.

### **How and Why They Came**

Mexican Americans form the largest Hispanic subgroup and also the oldest. Mexican migration to the United States started in the early 1900s in response to the need for cheap agricultural labor. Mexican migration was often circular; workers would stay for a few years and then go back to Mexico with more money than they could have made in their country of origin. The length of Mexico’s shared border with the United States has made immigration easier than for many other immigrant groups.

Cuban Americans are the second-largest Hispanic subgroup, and their history is quite different from that of Mexican Americans. The main wave of Cuban immigration to the United States started after Fidel Castro came to power in 1959 and reached its crest with the Mariel boatlift in 1980. Castro’s Cuban Revolution ushered in an era of communism that continues to this day. To avoid having their assets seized by the government, many wealthy and educated Cubans migrated north, generally to the Miami area.

### **History of Intergroup Relations**

For several decades, Mexican workers crossed the long border into the United States, both legally and illegally, to work in the fields that provided produce for the developing United States. Western growers needed a steady

supply of labor, and the 1940s and 1950s saw the official federal Bracero Program (*bracero* is Spanish for *strong-arm*) that offered protection to Mexican guest workers. Interestingly, 1954 also saw the enactment of “Operation Wetback,” which deported thousands of illegal Mexican workers. From these examples, we can see the U.S. treatment of immigration from Mexico has been ambivalent at best.

Sociologist Douglas Massey (2006) suggests that although the average standard of living in Mexico may be lower than in the United States, it is not so low as to make permanent migration the goal of most Mexicans. However, the strengthening of the border that began with 1986’s Immigration Reform and Control Act has made one-way migration the rule for most Mexicans. Massey argues that the rise of illegal one-way immigration of Mexicans is a direct outcome of the law that was intended to reduce it.

Cuban Americans, perhaps because of their relative wealth and education level at the time of immigration, have fared better than many immigrants. Further, because they were fleeing a Communist country, they were given refugee status and offered protection and social services. The Cuban Migration Agreement of 1995 has curtailed legal immigration from Cuba, leading many Cubans to try to immigrate illegally by boat. According to a 2009 report from the Congressional Research Service, the U.S. government applies a “wet foot/dry foot” policy toward Cuban immigrants; Cubans who are intercepted while still at sea will be returned to Cuba, while those who reach the shore will be permitted to stay in the United States.

## **Current Status**

Mexican Americans, especially those who are here illegally, are at the center of a national debate about immigration. Myers (2007) observes that no other minority group (except the Chinese) has immigrated to the United States in such an environment of illegality. He notes that in some years, three times as many Mexican immigrants may have entered the United States illegally as those who arrived legally. It should be noted that this is due to enormous disparity of economic opportunity on two sides of an open

border, not because of any inherent inclination to break laws. In his report, “Measuring Immigrant Assimilation in the United States,” Jacob Vigdor (2008) states that Mexican immigrants experience relatively low rates of economic and civic assimilation. He further suggests that “the slow rates of economic and civic assimilation set Mexicans apart from other immigrants, and may reflect the fact that the large numbers of Mexican immigrants residing in the United States illegally have few opportunities to advance themselves along these dimensions.”

By contrast, Cuban Americans are often seen as a model minority group within the larger Hispanic group. Many Cubans had higher socioeconomic status when they arrived in this country, and their anti-Communist agenda has made them welcome refugees to this country. In south Florida, especially, Cuban Americans are active in local politics and professional life. As with Asian Americans, however, being a model minority can mask the issue of powerlessness that these minority groups face in U.S. society.

**Note:**

Arizona’s Senate Bill 1070



Protesters in Arizona dispute the harsh new anti-immigration law.

(Photo courtesy of rprathap/flickr)

As both legal and illegal immigrants, and with high population numbers, Mexican Americans are often the target of stereotyping, racism, and discrimination. A harsh example of this is in Arizona, where a stringent immigration law—known as SB 1070 (for Senate Bill 1070)—has caused a nationwide controversy. The law requires that during a lawful stop, detention, or arrest, Arizona police officers must establish the immigration status of anyone they suspect may be here illegally. The law makes it a crime for individuals to fail to have documents confirming their legal status, and it gives police officers the right to detain people they suspect may be in the country illegally.

To many, the most troublesome aspect of this law is the latitude it affords police officers in terms of whose citizenship they may question. Having “reasonable suspicion that the person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States” is reason enough to demand immigration papers (Senate Bill 1070 2010). Critics say this law will encourage racial profiling (the illegal practice of law enforcement using race as a basis for suspecting someone of a crime), making it hazardous to be caught “Driving While Brown,” a takeoff on the legal term Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) or the slang reference of “Driving While Black.” Driving While Brown refers to the likelihood of getting pulled over just for being nonwhite.

SB 1070 has been the subject of many lawsuits, from parties as diverse as Arizona police officers, the American Civil Liberties Union, and even the federal government, which is suing on the basis of Arizona contradicting federal immigration laws (ACLU 2011). The future of SB 1070 is uncertain, but many other states have tried or are trying to pass similar measures. Do you think such measures are appropriate?

## **Arab Americans**

If ever a category was hard to define, the various groups lumped under the name “Arab American” is it. After all, Hispanic Americans or Asian Americans are so designated because of their countries of origin. But for Arab Americans, their country of origin—Arabia—has not existed for centuries. In addition, Arab Americans represent all religious practices, despite the stereotype that all Arabic people practice Islam. As Myers

(2007) asserts, not all Arabs are Muslim, and not all Muslims are Arab, complicating the stereotype of what it means to be an Arab American. Geographically, the Arab region comprises the Middle East and parts of northern Africa. People whose ancestry lies in that area or who speak primarily Arabic may consider themselves Arabs.

The U.S. Census has struggled with the issue of Arab identity. The 2010 Census, as in previous years, did not offer an “Arab” box to check under the question of race. Individuals who want to be counted as Arabs had to check the box for “Some other race” and then write in their race. However, when the Census data is tallied, they will be marked as white. This is problematic, however, denying Arab Americans opportunities for federal assistance. According to the best estimates of the U.S. Census Bureau, the Arabic population in the United States grew from 850,000 in 1990 to 1.2 million in 2000, an increase of .07 percent (Asi and Beaulieu 2013).

## **Why They Came**

The first Arab immigrants came to this country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were predominantly Syrian, Lebanese, and Jordanian Christians, and they came to escape persecution and to make a better life. These early immigrants and their descendants, who were more likely to think of themselves as Syrian or Lebanese than Arab, represent almost half of the Arab American population today (Myers 2007). Restrictive immigration policies from the 1920s until 1965 curtailed all immigration, but Arab immigration since 1965 has been steady. Immigrants from this time period have been more likely to be Muslim and more highly educated, escaping political unrest and looking for better opportunities.

## **History of Intergroup Relations**

Relations between Arab Americans and the dominant majority have been marked by mistrust, misinformation, and deeply entrenched beliefs. Helen Samhan of the Arab American Institute suggests that Arab-Israeli conflicts

in the 1970s contributed significantly to cultural and political anti-Arab sentiment in the United States (2001). The United States has historically supported the State of Israel, while some Middle Eastern countries deny the existence of the Israeli state. Disputes over these issues have involved Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine.

As is often the case with stereotyping and prejudice, the actions of extremists come to define the entire group, regardless of the fact that most U.S. citizens with ties to the Middle Eastern community condemn terrorist actions, as do most inhabitants of the Middle East. Would it be fair to judge all Catholics by the events of the Inquisition? Of course, the United States was deeply affected by the events of September 11, 2001. This event has left a deep scar on the American psyche, and it has fortified anti-Arab sentiment for a large percentage of Americans. In the first month after 9/11, hundreds of hate crimes were perpetrated against people who looked like they might be of Arab descent.

The proposed Park51 Muslim Community Center generated heated controversy due to its close proximity to Ground Zero. In these photos, people march in protest against the center, while counter-protesters demonstrate their support. (Photos (a) and (b) courtesy of David Shankbone/Wikimedia Commons)



## Current Status

Although the rate of hate crimes against Arab Americans has slowed, Arab Americans are still victims of racism and prejudice. Racial profiling has proceeded against Arab Americans as a matter of course since 9/11. Particularly when engaged in air travel, being young and Arab-looking is enough to warrant a special search or detainment. This Islamophobia

(irrational fear of or hatred against Muslims) does not show signs of abating. Scholars noted that white domestic terrorists like Timothy McVeigh, who detonated a bomb at an Oklahoma courthouse in 1995, have not inspired similar racial profiling or hate crimes against whites.

## **White Ethnic Americans**

As we have seen, there is no minority group that fits easily in a category or that can be described simply. While sociologists believe that individual experiences can often be understood in light of their social characteristics (such as race, class, or gender), we must balance this perspective with awareness that no two individuals' experiences are alike. Making generalizations can lead to stereotypes and prejudice. The same is true for white ethnic Americans, who come from diverse backgrounds and have had a great variety of experiences. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014), 77.7 percent of U.S. adults currently identify themselves as white alone. In this section, we will focus on German, Irish, Italian, and Eastern European immigrants.

## **Why They Came**

White ethnic Europeans formed the second and third great waves of immigration, from the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. They joined a newly minted United States that was primarily made up of white Protestants from England. While most immigrants came searching for a better life, their experiences were not all the same.

The first major influx of European immigrants came from Germany and Ireland, starting in the 1820s. Germans came both for economic opportunity and to escape political unrest and military conscription, especially after the Revolutions of 1848. Many German immigrants of this period were political refugees: liberals who wanted to escape from an oppressive government. They were well-off enough to make their way inland, and they formed heavily German enclaves in the Midwest that exist to this day.



The Irish immigrants of the same time period were not always as well off financially, especially after the Irish Potato Famine of 1845. Irish immigrants settled mainly in the cities of the East Coast, where they were employed as laborers and where they faced significant discrimination.

German and Irish immigration continued into the late 19th century and earlier 20th century, at which point the numbers for Southern and Eastern European immigrants started growing as well. Italians, mainly from the Southern part of the country, began arriving in large numbers in the 1890s. Eastern European immigrants—people from Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, and Austria-Hungary—started arriving around the same time. Many of these Eastern Europeans were peasants forced into a hardscrabble existence in their native lands; political unrest, land shortages, and crop failures drove them to seek better opportunities in the United States. The Eastern European immigration wave also included Jewish people escaping pogroms (anti-Jewish uprisings) of Eastern Europe and the Pale of Settlement in what was then Poland and Russia.

## **History of Intergroup Relations**

In a broad sense, German immigrants were not victimized to the same degree as many of the other subordinate groups this section discusses. While they may not have been welcomed with open arms, they were able to settle in enclaves and establish roots. A notable exception to this was during the lead up to World War I and through World War II, when anti-German sentiment was virulent.

Irish immigrants, many of whom were very poor, were more of an underclass than the Germans. In Ireland, the English had oppressed the Irish for centuries, eradicating their language and culture and discriminating against their religion (Catholicism). Although the Irish had a larger population than the English, they were a subordinate group. This dynamic reached into the new world, where Anglo Americans saw Irish immigrants as a race apart: dirty, lacking ambition, and suitable for only the most menial jobs. In fact, Irish immigrants were subject to criticism identical to that with which the dominant group characterized African Americans. By

necessity, Irish immigrants formed tight communities segregated from their Anglo neighbors.

The later wave of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe was also subject to intense discrimination and prejudice. In particular, the dominant group—which now included second- and third-generation Germans and Irish—saw Italian immigrants as the dregs of Europe and worried about the purity of the American race (Myers 2007). Italian immigrants lived in segregated slums in Northeastern cities, and in some cases were even victims of violence and lynchings similar to what African Americans endured. They worked harder and were paid less than other workers, often doing the dangerous work that other laborers were reluctant to take on.

## **Current Status**

The U.S. Census from 2008 shows that 16.5 percent of respondents reported being of German descent: the largest group in the country. For many years, German Americans endeavored to maintain a strong cultural identity, but they are now culturally assimilated into the dominant culture.

There are now more Irish Americans in the United States than there are Irish in Ireland. One of the country's largest cultural groups, Irish Americans have slowly achieved acceptance and assimilation into the dominant group.

Myers (2007) states that Italian Americans' cultural assimilation is "almost complete, but with remnants of ethnicity." The presence of "Little Italy" neighborhoods—originally segregated slums where Italians congregated in the nineteenth century—exist today. While tourists flock to the saints' festivals in Little Italies, most Italian Americans have moved to the suburbs at the same rate as other white groups.

## **Summary**

The history of the U.S. people contains an infinite variety of experiences that sociologists understand follow patterns. From the indigenous people

who first inhabited these lands to the waves of immigrants over the past 500 years, migration is an experience with many shared characteristics. Most groups have experienced various degrees of prejudice and discrimination as they have gone through the process of assimilation.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

What makes Native Americans unique as a subordinate group in the United States?

- a. They are the only group that experienced expulsion.
- b. They are the only group that was segregated.
- c. They are the only group that was enslaved.
- d. They are the only group that did not come here as immigrants.

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#### Solution:

#### Answer

D

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Which subordinate group is often referred to as the “model minority?”

- a. African Americans
- b. Asian Americans
- c. White ethnic Americans
- d. Native Americans

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#### Solution:

#### Answer

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which federal act or program was designed to allow more Hispanic American immigration, not block it?

- a. The Bracero Program
- b. Immigration Reform and Control Act
- c. Operation Wetback
- d. SB 1070

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**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Many Arab Americans face \_\_\_\_\_, especially after 9/11.

- a. racism
- b. segregation
- c. Islamophobia
- d. prejudice

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**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Why did most white ethnic Americans come to the United States?

- a. For a better life
  - b. To escape oppression
  - c. Because they were forced out of their own countries
  - d. a and b only
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

## Short Answer

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

In your opinion, which group had the easiest time coming to this country? Which group had the hardest time? Why?

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which group has made the most socioeconomic gains? Why do you think that group has had more success than others?

## Further Research

Are people interested in reclaiming their ethnic identities? Read this article and decide:

The White Ethnic Revival: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/ethnic\\_revival](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/ethnic_revival)

What is the current racial composition of the United States? Review up-to-the minute statistics at the United States Census Bureau here:

[https://openstax.org/l/US\\_Census](https://openstax.org/l/US_Census)

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## **Glossary**

model minority

the stereotype applied to a minority group that is seen as reaching higher educational, professional, and socioeconomic levels without protest against the majority establishment

## Introduction to Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

class="introduction"

Some  
children may  
learn at an  
early age that  
their gender  
does not  
correspond  
with their  
sex. (Photo  
courtesy of  
Rajesh  
Kumar/flickr  
)



In 2009, the eighteen-year old South African athlete, Caster Semenya, won the women's 800-meter world championship in Track and Field. Her time



of 1:55:45, a surprising improvement from her 2008 time of 2:08:00, caused officials from the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) to question whether her win was legitimate. If this questioning were based on suspicion of steroid use, the case would be no different from that of Roger Clemens or Mark McGuire, or even Track and Field Olympic gold medal winner Marion Jones. But the questioning and eventual testing were based on allegations that Caster Semenya, no matter what gender identity she possessed, was biologically a male.

You may be thinking that distinguishing biological maleness from biological femaleness is surely a simple matter—just conduct some DNA or hormonal testing, throw in a physical examination, and you’ll have the answer. But it is not that simple. Both biologically male and biologically female people produce a certain amount of testosterone, and different laboratories have different testing methods, which makes it difficult to set a specific threshold for the amount of male hormones produced by a female that renders her sex male. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) criteria for determining eligibility for sex-specific events are not intended to determine biological sex. “Instead these regulations are designed to identify circumstances in which a particular athlete will not be eligible (by reason of hormonal characteristics) to participate in the 2012 Olympic Games” in the female category (International Olympic Committee 2012).

To provide further context, during the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, eight female athletes with XY chromosomes underwent testing and were ultimately confirmed as eligible to compete as women (Maugh 2009). To date, no males have undergone this sort of testing. Doesn’t that imply that when women perform better than expected, they are “too masculine,” but when men perform well they are simply superior athletes? Can you imagine Usain Bolt, the world’s fastest man, being examined by doctors to prove he was biologically male based solely on his appearance and athletic ability?

Can you explain how sex, sexuality, and gender are different from each other?

In this chapter, we will discuss the differences between sex and gender, along with issues like gender identity and sexuality. We will also explore

various theoretical perspectives on the subjects of gender and sexuality, including the social construction of sexuality and queer theory.

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## Sex and Gender

- Define and differentiate between sex and gender
- Define and discuss what is meant by gender identity
- Understand and discuss the role of homophobia and heterosexism in society
- Distinguish the meanings of transgender, transsexual, and homosexual identities



While the biological differences between males and females are fairly straightforward, the social and cultural aspects of being a man or woman can be complicated. (Photo courtesy of FaceMePLS/flickr)

When filling out a document such as a job application or school registration form you are often asked to provide your name, address, phone number, birth date, and sex or gender. But have you ever been asked to provide your sex *and* your gender? Like most people, you may not have realized that sex and gender are not the same. However, sociologists and most other social scientists view them as conceptually distinct. **Sex** refers to physical or physiological differences between males and females, including both primary sex characteristics (the reproductive system) and secondary

characteristics such as height and muscularity. **Gender** refers to behaviors, personal traits, and social positions that society attributes to being female or male.

A person's sex, as determined by his or her biology, does not always correspond with his or her gender. Therefore, the terms *sex* and *gender* are not interchangeable. A baby boy who is born with male genitalia will be identified as male. As he grows, however, he may identify with the feminine aspects of his culture. Since the term *sex* refers to biological or physical distinctions, characteristics of sex will not vary significantly between different human societies. Generally, persons of the female sex, regardless of culture, will eventually menstruate and develop breasts that can lactate. Characteristics of gender, on the other hand, may vary greatly between different societies. For example, in U.S. culture, it is considered feminine (or a trait of the female gender) to wear a dress or skirt. However, in many Middle Eastern, Asian, and African cultures, dresses or skirts (often referred to as sarongs, robes, or gowns) are considered masculine. The kilt worn by a Scottish male does not make him appear feminine in his culture.

The dichotomous view of gender (the notion that someone is either male or female) is specific to certain cultures and is not universal. In some cultures gender is viewed as fluid. In the past, some anthropologists used the term *berdache* to refer to individuals who occasionally or permanently dressed and lived as a different gender. The practice has been noted among certain Native American tribes (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997). Samoan culture accepts what Samoans refer to as a “third gender.” *Fa’afafine*, which translates as “the way of the woman,” is a term used to describe individuals who are born biologically male but embody both masculine and feminine traits. *Fa’afafines* are considered an important part of Samoan culture. Individuals from other cultures may mislabel them as homosexuals because *fa’afafines* have a varied sexual life that may include men and women (Poasa 1992).

**Note:**

The Legalese of Sex and Gender

The terms *sex* and *gender* have not always been differentiated in the English language. It was not until the 1950s that U.S. and British psychologists and other professionals working with intersex and transsexual patients formally began distinguishing between sex and gender. Since then, psychological and physiological professionals have increasingly used the term *gender* (Moi 2005). By the end of the twenty-first century, expanding the proper usage of the term *gender* to everyday language became more challenging—particularly where legal language is concerned. In an effort to clarify usage of the terms *sex* and *gender*, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia wrote in a 1994 briefing, “The word *gender* has acquired the new and useful connotation of cultural or attitudinal characteristics (as opposed to physical characteristics) distinctive to the sexes. That is to say, *gender* is to *sex* as *feminine* is to *female* and *masculine* is to *male*” (*J.E.B. v. Alabama*, 144 S. Ct. 1436 [1994]). Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg had a different take, however. Viewing the words as synonymous, she freely swapped them in her briefings so as to avoid having the word “*sex*” pop up too often. It is thought that her secretary supported this practice by suggestions to Ginsburg that “those nine men” (the other Supreme Court justices), “hear that word and their first association is not the way you want them to be thinking” (Case 1995). This anecdote reveals that both *sex* and *gender* are actually socially defined variables whose definitions change over time.

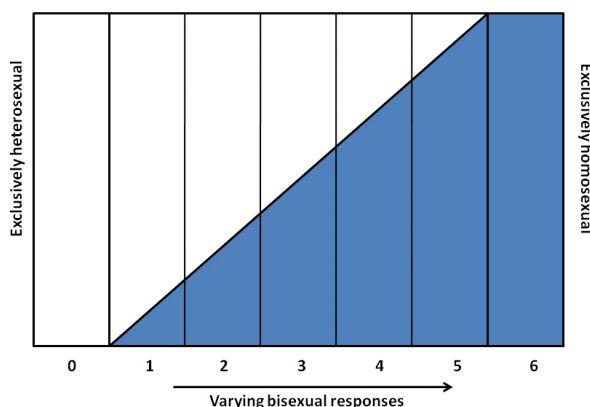
## Sexual Orientation

A person’s **sexual orientation** is his or her physical, mental, emotional, and sexual attraction to a particular sex (male or female). Sexual orientation is typically divided into four categories: *heterosexuality*, the attraction to individuals of the other sex; *homosexuality*, the attraction to individuals of the same sex; *bisexuality*, the attraction to individuals of either sex; and *asexuality*, no attraction to either sex. Heterosexuals and homosexuals may also be referred to informally as “straight” and “gay,” respectively. The United States is a **heteronormative society**, meaning it assumes sexual orientation is biologically determined and unambiguous. Consider that homosexuals are often asked, “When did you know you were gay?” but

heterosexuals are rarely asked, “When did you know that you were straight?” (Ryle 2011).

According to current scientific understanding, individuals are usually aware of their sexual orientation between middle childhood and early adolescence (American Psychological Association 2008). They do not have to participate in sexual activity to be aware of these emotional, romantic, and physical attractions; people can be celibate and still recognize their sexual orientation. Homosexual women (also referred to as lesbians), homosexual men (also referred to as gays), and bisexuals of both genders may have very different experiences of discovering and accepting their sexual orientation. At the point of puberty, some may be able to announce their sexual orientations, while others may be unready or unwilling to make their homosexuality or bisexuality known since it goes against U.S. society’s historical norms (APA 2008).

Alfred Kinsey was among the first to conceptualize sexuality as a continuum rather than a strict dichotomy of gay or straight. He created a six-point rating scale that ranges from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. See the figure below. In his 1948 work *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Kinsey writes, “Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats ... The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects” (Kinsey 1948).



The Kinsey scale indicates that

sexuality can be measured by more than just heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Later scholarship by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick expanded on Kinsey's notions. She coined the term "homosocial" to oppose "homosexual," describing nonsexual same-sex relations. Sedgwick recognized that in U.S. culture, males are subject to a clear divide between the two sides of this continuum, whereas females enjoy more fluidity. This can be illustrated by the way women in the United States can express homosocial feelings (nonsexual regard for people of the same sex) through hugging, handholding, and physical closeness. In contrast, U.S. males refrain from these expressions since they violate the heteronormative expectation that male sexual attraction should be exclusively for females. Research suggests that it is easier for women violate these norms than men, because men are subject to more social disapproval for being physically close to other men (Sedgwick 1985).

There is no scientific consensus regarding the exact reasons why an individual holds a heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual orientation. Research has been conducted to study the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, but there has been no evidence that links sexual orientation to one factor (APA 2008). Research, however, does present evidence showing that homosexuals and bisexuals are treated differently than heterosexuals in schools, the workplace, and the military. In 2011, for example, Sears and Mallory used General Social Survey data from 2008 to show that 27 percent of lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB) respondents reported experiencing sexual orientation-based discrimination during the five years prior to the survey. Further, 38 percent of openly LGB people experienced discrimination during the same time.

Much of this discrimination is based on stereotypes and misinformation. Some is based on **heterosexism**, which Herek (1990) suggests is both an ideology and a set of institutional practices that privilege heterosexuals and

heterosexuality over other sexual orientations. Much like racism and sexism, heterosexism is a systematic disadvantage embedded in our social institutions, offering power to those who conform to heterosexual orientation while simultaneously disadvantaging those who do not. *Homophobia*, an extreme or irrational aversion to homosexuals, accounts for further stereotyping and discrimination. Major policies to prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation have not come into effect until the last few years. In 2011, President Obama overturned “don’t ask, don’t tell,” a controversial policy that required homosexuals in the US military to keep their sexuality undisclosed. The Employee Non-Discrimination Act, which ensures workplace equality regardless of sexual orientation, is still pending full government approval. Organizations such as GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) advocate for homosexual rights and encourage governments and citizens to recognize the presence of sexual discrimination and work to prevent it. Other advocacy agencies frequently use the acronyms LGBT and LBGTQ, which stands for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender” (and “Queer” or “Questioning” when the Q is added).

Sociologically, it is clear that gay and lesbian couples are negatively affected in states where they are denied the legal right to marriage. In 1996, The Defense of Marriage Act (**DOMA**) was passed, explicitly limiting the definition of “marriage” to a union between one man and one woman. It also allowed individual states to choose whether or not they recognized same-sex marriages performed in other states. Imagine that you married an opposite-sex partner under similar conditions—if you went on a cross-country vacation the validity of your marriage would change every time you crossed state lines. In another blow to same-sex marriage advocates, in November 2008 California passed Proposition 8, a state law that limited marriage to unions of opposite-sex partners.

Over time, advocates for same-sex marriage have won several court cases, laying the groundwork for legalized same-sex marriage across the United States, including the June 2013 decision to overturn part of DOMA in *Windsor v. United States*, and the Supreme Court’s dismissal of *Hollingsworth v. Perry*, affirming the August 2010 ruling that found California’s Proposition 8 unconstitutional. In October 2014, the U.S.



Supreme Court declined to hear appeals to rulings against same-sex marriage bans, which effectively legalized same-sex marriage in Indiana, Oklahoma, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin, Colorado, North Carolina, West Virginia, and Wyoming (Freedom to Marry, Inc. 2014). Same-sex marriage is now legal across most of the United States. The next few years will determine whether the right to same-sex marriage is affirmed, depending on whether the U.S. Supreme Court takes a judicial step to guarantee the freedom to marry as a civil right.

## Gender Roles

As we grow, we learn how to behave from those around us. In this socialization process, children are introduced to certain roles that are typically linked to their biological sex. The term **gender role** refers to society's concept of how men and women are expected to look and how they should behave. These roles are based on norms, or standards, created by society. In U.S. culture, masculine roles are usually associated with strength, aggression, and dominance, while feminine roles are usually associated with passivity, nurturing, and subordination. Role learning starts with socialization at birth. Even today, our society is quick to outfit male infants in blue and girls in pink, even applying these color-coded gender labels while a baby is in the womb.

One way children learn gender roles is through play. Parents typically supply boys with trucks, toy guns, and superhero paraphernalia, which are active toys that promote motor skills, aggression, and solitary play. Daughters are often given dolls and dress-up apparel that foster nurturing, social proximity, and role play. Studies have shown that children will most likely choose to play with "gender appropriate" toys (or same-gender toys) even when cross-gender toys are available because parents give children positive feedback (in the form of praise, involvement, and physical closeness) for gender normative behavior (Caldera, Huston, and O'Brien 1998).



Fathers tend to be more involved when their sons engage in gender-appropriate activities such as sports. (Photo courtesy of Shawn Lea/flickr)

The drive to adhere to masculine and feminine gender roles continues later in life. Men tend to outnumber women in professions such as law enforcement, the military, and politics. Women tend to outnumber men in care-related occupations such as childcare, healthcare (even though the term “doctor” still conjures the image of a man), and social work. These occupational roles are examples of typical U.S. male and female behavior, derived from our culture’s traditions. Adherence to them demonstrates fulfillment of social expectations but not necessarily personal preference (Diamond 2002).

## **Gender Identity**

U.S. society allows for some level of flexibility when it comes to acting out gender roles. To a certain extent, men can assume some feminine roles and

women can assume some masculine roles without interfering with their gender identity. **Gender identity** is a person's deeply held internal perception of his or her gender.

Individuals who identify with the role that is different from their biological sex are called **transgender**. Transgender is not the same as homosexual, and many homosexual males view both their sex and gender as male. Transgender females are males who have such a strong emotional and psychological connection to the feminine aspects of society that they identify their gender as female. The parallel connection to masculinity exists for transgender males. It is difficult to determine the prevalence of transgenderism in society. However, it is estimated that two to five percent of the U.S. population is transgender (Transgender Law and Policy Institute 2007).

Transgender individuals who attempt to alter their bodies through medical interventions such as surgery and hormonal therapy—so that their physical being is better aligned with gender identity—are called **transsexuals**. They may also be known as male-to-female (MTF) or female-to-male (FTM). Not all transgender individuals choose to alter their bodies: many will maintain their original anatomy but may present themselves to society as another gender. This is typically done by adopting the dress, hairstyle, mannerisms, or other characteristic typically assigned to another gender. It is important to note that people who cross-dress, or wear clothing that is traditionally assigned to a gender different from their biological sex, are not necessarily transgender. Cross-dressing is typically a form of self-expression, entertainment, or personal style, and it is not necessarily an expression against one's assigned gender (APA 2008).

There is no single, conclusive explanation for why people are transgender. Transgender expressions and experiences are so diverse that it is difficult to identify their origin. Some hypotheses suggest biological factors such as genetics or prenatal hormone levels as well as social and cultural factors such as childhood and adulthood experiences. Most experts believe that all of these factors contribute to a person's gender identity (APA 2008).

After years of controversy over the treatment of sex and gender in the *American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for*

*Mental Disorders* (Drescher 2010), the most recent edition, DSM-5, responds to allegations that the term “Gender Identity Disorder” is stigmatizing by replacing it with “Gender Dysphoria.” Gender Identity Disorder as a diagnostic category stigmatized the patient by implying there was something “disordered” about them. Gender Dysphoria, on the other hand, removes some of that stigma by taking the word "disorder" out while maintaining a category that will protect patient access to care, including hormone therapy and gender reassignment surgery. In the DSM-5, **Gender Dysphoria** is a condition of people whose gender at birth is contrary to the one they identify with. For a person to be diagnosed with Gender Dysphoria, there must be a marked difference between the individual’s expressed/experienced gender and the gender others would assign him or her, and it must continue for at least six months. In children, the desire to be of the other gender must be present and verbalized. This diagnosis is now a separate category from sexual dysfunction and paraphilia, another important part of removing stigma from the diagnosis (APA 2013).

Changing the clinical description may contribute to a larger acceptance of transgender people in society. Studies show that people who identify as transgender are twice as likely to experience assault or discrimination as nontransgender individuals; they are also one and a half times more likely to experience intimidation (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs 2010; Giovanniello 2013). Organizations such as the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs and Global Action for Trans Equality work to prevent, respond to, and end all types of violence against transgender, transsexual, and homosexual individuals. These organizations hope that by educating the public about gender identity and empowering transgender and transsexual individuals, this violence will end.

**Note:**

**Real-Life *Freaky Friday***

What if you had to live as a sex you were not biologically born to? If you are a man, imagine that you were forced to wear frilly dresses, dainty shoes, and makeup to special occasions, and you were expected to enjoy romantic comedies and daytime talk shows. If you are a woman, imagine

that you were forced to wear shapeless clothing, put only minimal effort into your personal appearance, not show emotion, and watch countless hours of sporting events and sports-related commentary. It would be pretty uncomfortable, right? Well, maybe not. Many people enjoy participating in activities, whether they are associated with their biological sex or not, and would not mind if some of the cultural expectations for men and women were loosened.

Now, imagine that when you look at your body in the mirror, you feel disconnected. You feel your genitals are shameful and dirty, and you feel as though you are trapped in someone else's body with no chance of escape. As you get older, you hate the way your body is changing, and, therefore, you hate yourself. These elements of disconnect and shame are important to understand when discussing transgender individuals. Fortunately, sociological studies pave the way for a deeper and more empirically grounded understanding of the transgender experience.



Chaz Bono is the transgender son of Cher and Sonny Bono. While he was born female, he considers

himself male. Being transgender is not about clothing or hairstyles; it is about self-perception. (Photo courtesy of Greg Hernandez/flickr)

## Summary

The terms “sex” and “gender” refer to two different identifiers. Sex denotes biological characteristics differentiating males and females, while gender denotes social and cultural characteristics of masculine and feminine behavior. Sex and gender are not always synchronous. Individuals who strongly identify with the opposing gender are considered transgender.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

The terms “masculine” and “feminine” refer to a person’s \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. sex
- b. gender
- c. both sex and gender
- d. none of the above

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

B

### Exercise:

**Problem:**

The term \_\_\_\_\_ refers to society's concept of how men and women are expected to act and how they should behave.

- a. gender role
- b. gender bias
- c. sexual orientation
- d. sexual attitudes

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Research indicates that individuals are aware of their sexual orientation \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. at infancy
- b. in early adolescence
- c. in early adulthood
- d. in late adulthood

---

**Solution:****Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

A person who is biologically female but identifies with the male gender and has undergone surgery to alter her body is considered \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. transgender
- b. transsexual
- c. a cross-dresser
- d. homosexual

---

**Solution:****Answer**

B

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Which of following is correct regarding the explanation for transgenderism?

- a. It is strictly biological and associated with chemical imbalances in the brain.
- b. It is a behavior that is learned through socializing with other transgender individuals.
- c. It is genetic and usually skips one generation.
- d. Currently, there is no definitive explanation for transgenderism.

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**Solution:****Answer**

D

**Short Answer**



**Exercise:****Problem:**

Why do sociologists find it important to differentiate between sex and gender? What importance does the differentiation have in modern society?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

How is children's play influenced by gender roles? Think back to your childhood. How "gendered" were the toys and activities available to you? Do you remember gender expectations being conveyed through the approval or disapproval of your playtime choices?

**Further Research**

For more information on gender identity and advocacy for transgender individuals see the Global Action for Trans Equality web site at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/trans\\_equality](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/trans_equality).

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## **Glossary**

### **DOMA**

Defense of Marriage Act, a 1996 U.S. law explicitly limiting the definition of "marriage" to a union between one man and one woman and allowing each individual state to recognize or deny same-sex marriages performed in other states

### **gender dysphoria**

a condition listed in the DSM-5 in which people whose gender at birth is contrary to the one they identify with. This condition replaces "gender identity disorder"

### **gender identity**

a person's deeply held internal perception of his or her gender

### **gender role**

society's concept of how men and women should behave

gender

a term that refers to social or cultural distinctions of behaviors that are considered male or female

heterosexism

an ideology and a set of institutional practices that privilege heterosexuals and heterosexuality over other sexual orientations

homophobia

an extreme or irrational aversion to homosexuals

sex

a term that denotes the presence of physical or physiological differences between males and females

sexual orientation

a person's physical, mental, emotional, and sexual attraction to a particular sex (male or female)

transgender

an adjective that describes individuals who identify with the behaviors and characteristics that are other than their biological sex

transsexuals

transgender individuals who attempt to alter their bodies through medical interventions such as surgery and hormonal therapy

## Gender

- Explain the influence of socialization on gender roles in the United States
- Understand the stratification of gender in major American institutions
- Describe gender from the view of each sociological perspective



Traditional images  
of U.S. gender  
roles reinforce the  
idea that women  
should be  
subordinate to men.  
(Photo courtesy of  
Sport  
Suburban/flickr)

## Gender and Socialization

The phrase “boys will be boys” is often used to justify behavior such as pushing, shoving, or other forms of aggression from young boys. The phrase implies that such behavior is unchangeable and something that is part of a boy’s nature. Aggressive behavior, when it does not inflict

significant harm, is often accepted from boys and men because it is congruent with the cultural script for masculinity. The “script” written by society is in some ways similar to a script written by a playwright. Just as a playwright expects actors to adhere to a prescribed script, society expects women and men to behave according to the expectations of their respective gender roles. Scripts are generally learned through a process known as socialization, which teaches people to behave according to social norms.

## **Socialization**

Children learn at a young age that there are distinct expectations for boys and girls. Cross-cultural studies reveal that children are aware of gender roles by age two or three. At four or five, most children are firmly entrenched in culturally appropriate gender roles (Kane 1996). Children acquire these roles through socialization, a process in which people learn to behave in a particular way as dictated by societal values, beliefs, and attitudes. For example, society often views riding a motorcycle as a masculine activity and, therefore, considers it to be part of the male gender role. Attitudes such as this are typically based on stereotypes, oversimplified notions about members of a group. Gender stereotyping involves overgeneralizing about the attitudes, traits, or behavior patterns of women or men. For example, women may be thought of as too timid or weak to ride a motorcycle.



Although our society may  
have a stereotype that  
associates motorcycles  
with men, female bikers  
demonstrate that a  
woman's place extends  
far beyond the kitchen in  
the modern United States.  
(Photo courtesy of Robert  
Couse-Baker/flickr)

Gender stereotypes form the basis of sexism. **Sexism** refers to prejudiced beliefs that value one sex over another. It varies in its level of severity. In parts of the world where women are strongly undervalued, young girls may not be given the same access to nutrition, healthcare, and education as boys. Further, they will grow up believing they deserve to be treated differently from boys (UNICEF 2011; Thorne 1993). While it is illegal in the United States when practiced as discrimination, unequal treatment of women continues to pervade social life. It should be noted that discrimination based on sex occurs at both the micro- and macro-levels. Many sociologists focus on discrimination that is built into the social structure; this type of discrimination is known as institutional discrimination (Pincus 2008).

Gender socialization occurs through four major agents of socialization: family, education, peer groups, and mass media. Each agent reinforces gender roles by creating and maintaining normative expectations for gender-specific behavior. Exposure also occurs through secondary agents such as religion and the workplace. Repeated exposure to these agents over time leads men and women into a false sense that they are acting naturally rather than following a socially constructed role.

Family is the first agent of socialization. There is considerable evidence that parents socialize sons and daughters differently. Generally speaking, girls are given more latitude to step outside of their prescribed gender role (Coltrane and Adams 2004; Kimmel 2000; Raffaelli and Ontai 2004).

However, differential socialization typically results in greater privileges afforded to sons. For instance, boys are allowed more autonomy and independence at an earlier age than daughters. They may be given fewer restrictions on appropriate clothing, dating habits, or curfew. Sons are also often free from performing domestic duties such as cleaning or cooking and other household tasks that are considered feminine. Daughters are limited by their expectation to be passive and nurturing, generally obedient, and to assume many of the domestic responsibilities.

Even when parents set gender equality as a goal, there may be underlying indications of inequality. For example, boys may be asked to take out the garbage or perform other tasks that require strength or toughness, while girls may be asked to fold laundry or perform duties that require neatness and care. It has been found that fathers are firmer in their expectations for gender conformity than are mothers, and their expectations are stronger for sons than they are for daughters (Kimmel 2000). This is true in many types of activities, including preference for toys, play styles, discipline, chores, and personal achievements. As a result, boys tend to be particularly attuned to their father's disapproval when engaging in an activity that might be considered feminine, like dancing or singing (Coltraine and Adams 2008). Parental socialization and normative expectations also vary along lines of social class, race, and ethnicity. African American families, for instance, are more likely than Caucasians to model an egalitarian role structure for their children (Staples and Boulin Johnson 2004).

The reinforcement of gender roles and stereotypes continues once a child reaches school age. Until very recently, schools were rather explicit in their efforts to stratify boys and girls. The first step toward stratification was segregation. Girls were encouraged to take home economics or humanities courses and boys to take math and science.

Studies suggest that gender socialization still occurs in schools today, perhaps in less obvious forms (Lips 2004). Teachers may not even realize they are acting in ways that reproduce gender differentiated behavior patterns. Yet any time they ask students to arrange their seats or line up according to gender, teachers may be asserting that boys and girls should be treated differently (Thorne 1993).



Even in levels as low as kindergarten, schools subtly convey messages to girls indicating that they are less intelligent or less important than boys. For example, in a study of teacher responses to male and female students, data indicated that teachers praised male students far more than female students. Teachers interrupted girls more often and gave boys more opportunities to expand on their ideas (Sadker and Sadker 1994). Further, in social as well as academic situations, teachers have traditionally treated boys and girls in opposite ways, reinforcing a sense of competition rather than collaboration (Thorne 1993). Boys are also permitted a greater degree of freedom to break rules or commit minor acts of deviance, whereas girls are expected to follow rules carefully and adopt an obedient role (Ready 2001).

Mimicking the actions of significant others is the first step in the development of a separate sense of self (Mead 1934). Like adults, children become agents who actively facilitate and apply normative gender expectations to those around them. When children do not conform to the appropriate gender role, they may face negative sanctions such as being criticized or marginalized by their peers. Though many of these sanctions are informal, they can be quite severe. For example, a girl who wishes to take karate class instead of dance lessons may be called a “tomboy” and face difficulty gaining acceptance from both male and female peer groups (Ready 2001). Boys, especially, are subject to intense ridicule for gender nonconformity (Coltrane and Adams 2004; Kimmel 2000).

Mass media serves as another significant agent of gender socialization. In television and movies, women tend to have less significant roles and are often portrayed as wives or mothers. When women are given a lead role, it often falls into one of two extremes: a wholesome, saint-like figure or a malevolent, hypersexual figure (Etaugh and Bridges 2003). This same inequality is pervasive in children’s movies (Smith 2008). Research indicates that in the ten top-grossing G-rated movies released between 1991 and 2013, nine out of ten characters were male (Smith 2008).

Television commercials and other forms of advertising also reinforce inequality and gender-based stereotypes. Women are almost exclusively present in ads promoting cooking, cleaning, or childcare-related products (Davis 1993). Think about the last time you saw a man star in a dishwasher

or laundry detergent commercial. In general, women are underrepresented in roles that involve leadership, intelligence, or a balanced psyche. Of particular concern is the depiction of women in ways that are dehumanizing, especially in music videos. Even in mainstream advertising, however, themes intermingling violence and sexuality are quite common (Kilbourne 2000).

## **Social Stratification and Inequality**

Stratification refers to a system in which groups of people experience unequal access to basic, yet highly valuable, social resources. The United States is characterized by gender stratification (as well as stratification of race, income, occupation, and the like). Evidence of gender stratification is especially keen within the economic realm. Despite making up nearly half (49.8 percent) of payroll employment, men vastly outnumber women in authoritative, powerful, and, therefore, high-earning jobs (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Even when a woman's employment status is equal to a man's, she will generally make only 77 cents for every dollar made by her male counterpart (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Women in the paid labor force also still do the majority of the unpaid work at home. On an average day, 84 percent of women (compared to 67 percent of men) spend time doing household management activities (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). This double duty keeps working women in a subordinate role in the family structure (Hochschild and Machung 1989).

Gender stratification through the division of labor is not exclusive to the United States. According to George Murdock's classic work, *Outline of World Cultures* (1954), all societies classify work by gender. When a pattern appears in all societies, it is called a cultural universal. While the phenomenon of assigning work by gender is universal, its specifics are not. The same task is not assigned to either men or women worldwide. But the way each task's associated gender is valued is notable. In Murdock's examination of the division of labor among 324 societies around the world, he found that in nearly all cases the jobs assigned to men were given greater prestige (Murdock and White 1968). Even if the job types were very similar and the differences slight, men's work was still considered more vital.

There is a long history of gender stratification in the United States. When looking to the past, it would appear that society has made great strides in terms of abolishing some of the most blatant forms of gender inequality (see timeline below) but underlying effects of male dominance still permeate many aspects of society.

- Before 1809—Women could not execute a will
- Before 1840—Women were not allowed to own or control property
- Before 1920—Women were not permitted to vote
- Before 1963—Employers could legally pay a woman less than a man for the same work
- Before 1973—Women did not have the right to a safe and legal abortion (Imbornoni 2009)



In some cultures, women do all of the household chores with no help from men, as doing housework is a sign of weakness, considered by society as a feminine trait. (Photo courtesy of Evil Erin/flickr)

## Theoretical Perspectives on Gender

Sociological theories help sociologists to develop questions and interpret data. For example, a sociologist studying why middle-school girls are more likely than their male counterparts to fall behind grade-level expectations in math and science might use a feminist perspective to frame her research. Another scholar might proceed from the conflict perspective to investigate why women are underrepresented in political office, and an interactionist might examine how the symbols of femininity interact with symbols of political authority to affect how women in Congress are treated by their male counterparts in meetings.

## **Structural Functionalism**

Structural functionalism has provided one of the most important perspectives of sociological research in the twentieth century and has been a major influence on research in the social sciences, including gender studies. Viewing the family as the most integral component of society, assumptions about gender roles within marriage assume a prominent place in this perspective.

Functionalists argue that gender roles were established well before the pre-industrial era when men typically took care of responsibilities outside of the home, such as hunting, and women typically took care of the domestic responsibilities in or around the home. These roles were considered functional because women were often limited by the physical restraints of pregnancy and nursing and unable to leave the home for long periods of time. Once established, these roles were passed on to subsequent generations since they served as an effective means of keeping the family system functioning properly.

When changes occurred in the social and economic climate of the United States during World War II, changes in the family structure also occurred. Many women had to assume the role of breadwinner (or modern hunter-gatherer) alongside their domestic role in order to stabilize a rapidly changing society. When the men returned from war and wanted to reclaim their jobs, society fell back into a state of imbalance, as many women did not want to forfeit their wage-earning positions (Hawke 2007).

## **Conflict Theory**

According to conflict theory, society is a struggle for dominance among social groups (like women versus men) that compete for scarce resources. When sociologists examine gender from this perspective, we can view men as the dominant group and women as the subordinate group. According to conflict theory, social problems are created when dominant groups exploit or oppress subordinate groups. Consider the Women's Suffrage Movement or the debate over women's "right to choose" their reproductive futures. It is difficult for women to rise above men, as dominant group members create the rules for success and opportunity in society (Farrington and Chertok 1993).

Friedrich Engels, a German sociologist, studied family structure and gender roles. Engels suggested that the same owner-worker relationship seen in the labor force is also seen in the household, with women assuming the role of the proletariat. This is due to women's dependence on men for the attainment of wages, which is even worse for women who are entirely dependent upon their spouses for economic support. Contemporary conflict theorists suggest that when women become wage earners, they can gain power in the family structure and create more democratic arrangements in the home, although they may still carry the majority of the domestic burden, as noted earlier (Risman and Johnson-Sumerford 1998).

## **Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory is a type of conflict theory that examines inequalities in gender-related issues. It uses the conflict approach to examine the maintenance of gender roles and inequalities. Radical feminism, in particular, considers the role of the family in perpetuating male dominance. In patriarchal societies, men's contributions are seen as more valuable than those of women. Patriarchal perspectives and arrangements are widespread and taken for granted. As a result, women's viewpoints tend to be silenced or marginalized to the point of being discredited or considered invalid.

Sanday's study of the Indonesian Minangkabau (2004) revealed that in societies some consider to be matriarchies (where women comprise the dominant group), women and men tend to work cooperatively rather than competitively regardless of whether a job is considered feminine by U.S. standards. The men, however, do not experience the sense of bifurcated consciousness under this social structure that modern U.S. females encounter (Sanday 2004).

## Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism aims to understand human behavior by analyzing the critical role of symbols in human interaction. This is certainly relevant to the discussion of masculinity and femininity. Imagine that you walk into a bank hoping to get a small loan for school, a home, or a small business venture. If you meet with a male loan officer, you may state your case logically by listing all the hard numbers that make you a qualified applicant as a means of appealing to the analytical characteristics associated with masculinity. If you meet with a female loan officer, you may make an emotional appeal by stating your good intentions as a means of appealing to the caring characteristics associated with femininity.

Because the meanings attached to symbols are socially created and not natural, and fluid, not static, we act and react to symbols based on the current assigned meaning. The word *gay*, for example, once meant "cheerful," but by the 1960s it carried the primary meaning of "homosexual." In transition, it was even known to mean "careless" or "bright and showing" (Oxford American Dictionary 2010). Furthermore, the word *gay* (as it refers to a homosexual), carried a somewhat negative and unfavorable meaning fifty years ago, but it has since gained more neutral and even positive connotations. When people perform tasks or possess characteristics based on the gender role assigned to them, they are said to be **doing gender**. This notion is based on the work of West and Zimmerman (1987). Whether we are expressing our masculinity or femininity, West and Zimmerman argue, we are always "doing gender." Thus, gender is something we do or perform, not something we are.

In other words, both gender and sexuality are socially constructed. The **social construction of sexuality** refers to the way in which socially created definitions about the cultural appropriateness of sex-linked behavior shape the way people see and experience sexuality. This is in marked contrast to theories of sex, gender, and sexuality that link male and female behavior to **biological determinism**, or the belief that men and women behave differently due to differences in their biology.

**Note:**

**Being Male, Being Female, and Being Healthy**

In 1971, Broverman and Broverman conducted a groundbreaking study on the traits mental health workers ascribed to males and females. When asked to name the characteristics of a female, the list featured words such as unaggressive, gentle, emotional, tactful, less logical, not ambitious, dependent, passive, and neat. The list of male characteristics featured words such as aggressive, rough, unemotional, blunt, logical, direct, active, and sloppy (Seem and Clark 2006). Later, when asked to describe the characteristics of a healthy person (not gender specific), the list was nearly identical to that of a male.

This study uncovered the general assumption that being female is associated with being somewhat unhealthy or not of sound mind. This concept seems extremely dated, but in 2006, Seem and Clark replicated the study and found similar results. Again, the characteristics associated with a healthy male were very similar to that of a healthy (genderless) adult. The list of characteristics associated with being female broadened somewhat but did not show significant change from the original study (Seem and Clark 2006). This interpretation of feminine characteristic may help us one day better understand gender disparities in certain illnesses, such as why one in eight women can be expected to develop clinical depression in her lifetime (National Institute of Mental Health 1999). Perhaps these diagnoses are not just a reflection of women's health, but also a reflection of society's labeling of female characteristics, or the result of institutionalized sexism.

## Summary

Children become aware of gender roles in their earliest years, and they come to understand and perform these roles through socialization, which occurs through four major agents: family, education, peer groups, and mass media. Socialization into narrowly prescribed gender roles results in the stratification of males and females. Each sociological perspective offers a valuable view for understanding how and why gender inequality occurs in our society.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Which of the following is the best example of a gender stereotype?

- a. Women are typically shorter than men.
- b. Men do not live as long as women.
- c. Women tend to be overly emotional, while men tend to be levelheaded.
- d. Men hold more high-earning, leadership jobs than women.

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#### Solution:

#### Answer

C

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Which of the following is the best example of the role peers play as an agent of socialization for school-aged children?

- a. Children can act however they wish around their peers because children are unaware of gender roles.



- b. Peers serve as a support system for children who wish to act outside of their assigned gender roles.
- c. Peers tend to reinforce gender roles by criticizing and marginalizing those who behave outside of their assigned roles.
- d. None of the above

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

To which theoretical perspective does the following statement most likely apply: Women continue to assume the responsibility in the household along with a paid occupation because it keeps the household running smoothly, i.e., at a state of balance?

- a. Conflict theory
- b. Functionalism
- c. Feminist theory
- d. Symbolic interactionism

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**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Only women are affected by gender stratification.

- a. True
  - b. False
-

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

According to the symbolic interactionist perspective, we “do gender”:

- a. during half of our activities
- b. only when they apply to our biological sex
- c. only if we are actively following gender roles
- d. all of the time, in everything we do

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**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

In what way do parents treat sons and daughters differently? How do sons and daughters typically respond to this treatment?

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What can be done to lessen the effects of gender stratification in the workplace? How does gender stratification harm both men and women?

## Further Research

Learn more about gender at the Kinsey Institute here:

<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/2EKinsey>

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## **Glossary**

biological determinism

the belief that men and women behave differently due to inherent sex differences related to their biology

doing gender

the performance of tasks based upon the gender assigned to us by society and, in turn, ourselves

sexism

the prejudiced belief that one sex should be valued over another

social construction of sexuality

socially created definitions about the cultural appropriateness of sex-linked behavior which shape how people see and experience sexuality

## Sex and Sexuality

- Understand different attitudes associated with sex and sexuality
- Define sexual inequality in various societies
- Discuss theoretical perspectives on sex and sexuality



Sexual practices can differ greatly among groups. Recent trends include the finding that married couples have sex more frequently than do singles and that 27 percent of married couples in their 30s have sex at least twice a week (NSSHB 2010). (Photo courtesy of epSos.de/flickr)

## Sexual Attitudes and Practices

In the area of sexuality, sociologists focus their attention on sexual attitudes and practices, not on physiology or anatomy. **Sexuality** is viewed as a person's capacity for sexual feelings. Studying sexual attitudes and practices is a particularly interesting field of sociology because sexual behavior is a cultural universal. Throughout time and place, the vast

majority of human beings have participated in sexual relationships (Broude 2003). Each society, however, interprets sexuality and sexual activity in different ways. Many societies around the world have different attitudes about premarital sex, the age of sexual consent, homosexuality, masturbation, and other sexual behaviors (Widmer, Treas, and Newcomb 1998). At the same time, sociologists have learned that certain norms are shared among most societies. The incest taboo is present in every society, though which relative is deemed unacceptable for sex varies widely from culture to culture. For example, sometimes the relatives of the father are considered acceptable sexual partners for a woman while the relatives of the mother are not. Likewise, societies generally have norms that reinforce their accepted social system of sexuality.

What is considered “normal” in terms of sexual behavior is based on the mores and values of the society. Societies that value monogamy, for example, would likely oppose extramarital sex. Individuals are socialized to sexual attitudes by their family, education system, peers, media, and religion. Historically, religion has been the greatest influence on sexual behavior in most societies, but in more recent years, peers and the media have emerged as two of the strongest influences, particularly among U.S. teens (Potard, Courtois, and Rusch 2008). Let us take a closer look at sexual attitudes in the United States and around the world.

## **Sexuality around the World**

Cross-national research on sexual attitudes in industrialized nations reveals that normative standards differ across the world. For example, several studies have shown that Scandinavian students are more tolerant of premarital sex than are U.S. students (Grose 2007). A study of 37 countries reported that non-Western societies—like China, Iran, and India—valued chastity highly in a potential mate, while Western European countries—such as France, the Netherlands, and Sweden—placed little value on prior sexual experiences (Buss 1989).



<b>Country</b>	<b>Males (Mean)</b>	<b>Females (Mean)</b>
China	2.54	2.61
India	2.44	2.17
Indonesia	2.06	1.98
Iran	2.67	2.23
Israel (Palestinian)	2.24	0.96
Sweden	0.25	0.28
Norway	0.31	0.30
Finland	0.27	0.29
The Netherlands	0.29	0.29

### Chastity in Terms of Potential MatesSource: Buss 1989

Even among Western cultures, attitudes can differ. For example, according to a 33,590-person survey across 24 countries, 89 percent of Swedes responded that there is nothing wrong with premarital sex, while only 42 percent of Irish responded this way. From the same study, 93 percent of Filipinos responded that sex before age 16 is always wrong or almost always wrong, while only 75 percent of Russians responded this way (Widmer, Treas, and Newcomb 1998). Sexual attitudes can also vary within a country. For instance, 45 percent of Spaniards responded that homosexuality is always wrong, while 42 percent responded that it is never wrong; only 13 percent responded somewhere in the middle (Widmer, Treas, and Newcomb 1998).

Of industrialized nations, Sweden is thought to be the most liberal when it comes to attitudes about sex, including sexual practices and sexual openness. The country has very few regulations on sexual images in the

media, and sex education, which starts around age six, is a compulsory part of Swedish school curricula. Sweden's permissive approach to sex has helped the country avoid some of the major social problems associated with sex. For example, rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease are among the world's lowest (Grose 2007). It would appear that Sweden is a model for the benefits of sexual freedom and frankness. However, implementing Swedish ideals and policies regarding sexuality in other, more politically conservative, nations would likely be met with resistance.

## **Sexuality in the United States**

The United States prides itself on being the land of the "free," but it is rather restrictive when it comes to its citizens' general attitudes about sex compared to other industrialized nations. In an international survey, 29 percent of U.S. respondents stated that premarital sex is always wrong, while the average among the 24 countries surveyed was 17 percent. Similar discrepancies were found in questions about the condemnation of sex before the age of 16, extramarital sex, and homosexuality, with total disapproval of these acts being 12, 13, and 11 percent higher, respectively, in the United States, than the study's average (Widmer, Treas, and Newcomb 1998).

U.S. culture is particularly restrictive in its attitudes about sex when it comes to women and sexuality. It is widely believed that men are more sexual than are women. In fact, there is a popular notion that men think about sex every seven seconds. Research, however, suggests that men think about sex an average of 19 times per day, compared to 10 times per day for women (Fisher, Moore, and Pittenger 2011).

Belief that men have—or have the right to—more sexual urges than women creates a double standard. Ira Reiss, a pioneer researcher in the field of sexual studies, defined the *double standard* as prohibiting premarital sexual intercourse for women but allowing it for men (Reiss 1960). This standard has evolved into allowing women to engage in premarital sex only within committed love relationships, but allowing men to engage in sexual relationships with as many partners as they wish without condition

(Milhausen and Herold 1999). Due to this double standard, a woman is likely to have fewer sexual partners in her life time than a man. According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) survey, the average thirty-five-year-old woman has had three opposite-sex sexual partners while the average thirty-five-year-old man has had twice as many (Centers for Disease Control 2011).

The future of a society's sexual attitudes may be somewhat predicted by the values and beliefs that a country's youth expresses about sex and sexuality. Data from the most recent National Survey of Family Growth reveals that 70 percent of boys and 78 percent of girls ages fifteen to nineteen said they "agree" or "strongly agree" that "it's okay for an unmarried female to have a child" (National Survey of Family Growth 2013). In a separate survey, 65 percent of teens stated that they "strongly agreed" or "somewhat agreed" that although waiting until marriage for sex is a nice idea, it's not realistic (NBC News 2005). This does not mean that today's youth have given up traditional sexual values such as monogamy. Nearly all college men (98.9 percent) and women (99.2 percent) who participated in a 2002 study on sexual attitudes stated they wished to settle down with one mutually exclusive sexual partner at some point in their lives, ideally within the next five years (Pedersen et al. 2002).

## **Sex Education**

One of the biggest controversies regarding sexual attitudes is sexual education in U.S. classrooms. Unlike in Sweden, sex education is not required in all public school curricula in the United States. The heart of the controversy is not about whether sex education should be taught in school (studies have shown that only seven percent of U.S. adults oppose sex education in schools); it is about the *type* of sex education that should be taught.

Much of the debate is over the issue of abstinence. In a 2005 survey, 15 percent of U.S. respondents believed that schools should teach abstinence exclusively and should not provide contraceptives or information on how to obtain them. Forty-six percent believed schools should institute an

abstinence-plus approach, which teaches children that abstinence is best but still gives information about protected sex. Thirty-six percent believed teaching about abstinence is not important and that sex education should focus on sexual safety and responsibility (NPR 2010).

Research suggests that while government officials may still be debating about the content of sexual education in public schools, the majority of U.S. adults are not. Those who advocated abstinence-only programs may be the proverbial squeaky wheel when it comes to this controversy, since they represent only 15 percent of parents. Fifty-five percent of respondents feel giving teens information about sex and how to obtain and use protection will not encourage them to have sexual relations earlier than they would under an abstinence program. About 77 percent think such a curriculum would make teens more likely to practice safe sex now and in the future (NPR 2004).

Sweden, whose comprehensive sex education program in its public schools educates participants about safe sex, can serve as a model for this approach. The teenage birthrate in Sweden is 7 per 1,000 births, compared with 49 per 1,000 births in the United States. Among fifteen to nineteen year olds, reported cases of gonorrhea in Sweden are nearly 600 times lower than in the United States (Grose 2007).

## **Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Sexuality**

Sociologists representing all three major theoretical perspectives study the role sexuality plays in social life today. Scholars recognize that sexuality continues to be an important and defining social location and that the manner in which sexuality is constructed has a significant effect on perceptions, interactions, and outcomes.

### **Structural Functionalism**

When it comes to sexuality, functionalists stress the importance of regulating sexual behavior to ensure marital cohesion and family stability. Since functionalists identify the family unit as the most integral component

in society, they maintain a strict focus on it at all times and argue in favor of social arrangements that promote and ensure family preservation.

Functionalists such as Talcott Parsons (1955) have long argued that the regulation of sexual activity is an important function of the family. Social norms surrounding family life have, traditionally, encouraged sexual activity within the family unit (marriage) and have discouraged activity outside of it (premarital and extramarital sex). From a functionalist point of view, the purpose of encouraging sexual activity in the confines of marriage is to intensify the bond between spouses and to ensure that procreation occurs within a stable, legally recognized relationship. This structure gives offspring the best possible chance for appropriate socialization and the provision of basic resources.

From a functionalist standpoint, homosexuality cannot be promoted on a large-scale as an acceptable substitute for heterosexuality. If this occurred, procreation would eventually cease. Thus, homosexuality, if occurring predominantly within the population, is dysfunctional to society. This criticism does not take into account the increasing legal acceptance of same-sex marriage, or the rise in gay and lesbian couples who choose to bear and raise children through a variety of available resources.

## **Conflict Theory**

From a conflict theory perspective, sexuality is another area in which power differentials are present and where dominant groups actively work to promote their worldview as well as their economic interests. Recently, we have seen the debate over the legalization of gay marriage intensify nationwide.

For conflict theorists, there are two key dimensions to the debate over same-sex marriage—one ideological and the other economic. Dominant groups (in this instance, heterosexuals) wish for their worldview—which embraces traditional marriage and the nuclear family—to win out over what they see as the intrusion of a secular, individually driven worldview. On the other hand, many gay and lesbian activists argue that legal marriage is a

fundamental right that cannot be denied based on sexual orientation and that, historically, there already exists a precedent for changes to marriage laws: the 1960s legalization of formerly forbidden interracial marriages is one example.

From an economic perspective, activists in favor of same-sex marriage point out that legal marriage brings with it certain entitlements, many of which are financial in nature, like Social Security benefits and medical insurance (Solmonese 2008). Denial of these benefits to gay couples is wrong, they argue. Conflict theory suggests that as long as heterosexuals and homosexuals struggle over these social and financial resources, there will be some degree of conflict.

## **Symbolic Interactionism**

Interactionists focus on the meanings associated with sexuality and with sexual orientation. Since femininity is devalued in U.S. society, those who adopt such traits are subject to ridicule; this is especially true for boys or men. Just as masculinity is the symbolic norm, so too has heterosexuality come to signify normalcy. Prior to 1973, the American Psychological Association (APA) defined homosexuality as an abnormal or deviant disorder. Interactionist labeling theory recognizes the impact this has made. Before 1973, the APA was powerful in shaping social attitudes toward homosexuality by defining it as pathological. Today, the APA cites no association between sexual orientation and psychopathology and sees homosexuality as a normal aspect of human sexuality (APA 2008).

Interactionists are also interested in how discussions of homosexuals often focus almost exclusively on the sex lives of gays and lesbians; homosexuals, especially men, may be assumed to be hypersexual and, in some cases, deviant. Interactionism might also focus on the slurs used to describe homosexuals. Labels such as “queen” and “fag” are often used to demean homosexual men by feminizing them. This subsequently affects how homosexuals perceive themselves. Recall Cooley’s “looking-glass self,” which suggests that self develops as a result of our interpretation and evaluation of the responses of others (Cooley 1902). Constant exposure to

derogatory labels, jokes, and pervasive homophobia would lead to a negative self-image, or worse, self-hate. The CDC reports that homosexual youths who experience high levels of social rejection are six times more likely to have high levels of depression and eight times more likely to have attempted suicide (CDC 2011).

## **Queer Theory**

**Queer Theory** is an interdisciplinary approach to sexuality studies that identifies Western society's rigid splitting of gender into male and female roles and questions the manner in which we have been taught to think about sexual orientation. According to Jagose (1996), Queer [Theory] focuses on mismatches between anatomical sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation, not just division into male/female or homosexual/heterosexual. By calling their discipline "queer," scholars reject the effects of labeling; instead, they embraced the word "queer" and reclaimed it for their own purposes. The perspective highlights the need for a more flexible and fluid conceptualization of sexuality—one that allows for change, negotiation, and freedom. The current schema used to classify individuals as either "heterosexual" or "homosexual" pits one orientation against the other. This mirrors other oppressive schemas in our culture, especially those surrounding gender and race (black versus white, male versus female).

Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argued against U.S. society's monolithic definition of sexuality and its reduction to a single factor: the sex of someone's desired partner. Sedgwick identified dozens of other ways in which people's sexualities were different, such as:

- Even identical genital acts mean very different things to different people.
- Sexuality makes up a large share of the self-perceived identity of some people, a small share of others'.
- Some people spend a lot of time thinking about sex, others little.
- Some people like to have a lot of sex, others little or none.
- Many people have their richest mental/emotional involvement with sexual acts that they don't do, or don't even want to do.

- Some people like spontaneous sexual scenes, others like highly scripted ones, others like spontaneous-sounding ones that are nonetheless totally predictable.
- Some people, homo- hetero- and bisexual, experience their sexuality as deeply embedded in a matrix of gender meanings and gender differentials. Others of each sexuality do not (Sedgwick 1990).

Thus, theorists utilizing queer theory strive to question the ways society perceives and experiences sex, gender, and sexuality, opening the door to new scholarly understanding.

Throughout this chapter we have examined the complexities of gender, sex, and sexuality. Differentiating between sex, gender, and sexual orientation is an important first step to a deeper understanding and critical analysis of these issues. Understanding the sociology of sex, gender, and sexuality will help to build awareness of the inequalities experienced by subordinate categories such as women, homosexuals, and transgender individuals.

## Summary

When studying sex and sexuality, sociologists focus their attention on sexual attitudes and practices, not on physiology or anatomy. Norms regarding gender and sexuality vary across cultures. In general, the United States tends to be fairly conservative in its sexual attitudes. As a result, homosexuals continue to face opposition and discrimination in most major social institutions.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

What Western country is thought to be the most liberal in its attitudes toward sex?

- United States



- b. Sweden
- c. Mexico
- d. Ireland

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Compared to most Western societies, U.S. sexual attitudes are considered \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. conservative
- b. liberal
- c. permissive
- d. free

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Sociologists associate sexuality with \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. heterosexuality
- b. homosexuality
- c. biological factors
- d. a person's capacity for sexual feelings

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

According to national surveys, most U.S. parents support which type of sex education program in school?

- a. Abstinence only
- b. Abstinence plus sexual safety
- c. Sexual safety without promoting abstinence
- d. No sex education

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which theoretical perspective stresses the importance of regulating sexual behavior to ensure marital cohesion and family stability?

- a. Functionalism
- b. Conflict theory
- c. Symbolic interactionalism
- d. Queer theory

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Identify three examples of how U.S. society is heteronormative.

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Consider the types of derogatory labeling that sociologists study and explain how these might apply to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

**Further Research**

For more information about sexual attitudes and practices in countries around the world, see the entire “Attitudes Toward Nonmarital Sex in 24 Countries” article from the *Journal of Sex Research* at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/journal\\_of\\_sex\\_research](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/journal_of_sex_research).

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## Glossary

double standard

the concept that prohibits premarital sexual intercourse for women but allows it for men

queer theory

an interdisciplinary approach to sexuality studies that identifies Western society's rigid splitting of gender into male and female roles and questions its appropriateness

sexuality

a person's capacity for sexual feelings

## Introduction to Marriage and Family class="introduction"

What  
constitutes a  
family  
nowadays?  
(Photo  
courtesy of  
Michael/flickr  
)



Rebecca and John were having a large church wedding attended by family and friends. They had been living together their entire senior year of college

and planned on getting married right after graduation.

Rebecca's parents were very traditional in their life and family. They had married after college at which time Rebecca's mother was a stay-at-home mother and Rebecca's father was a Vice President at a large accounting firm. The marriage was viewed as very strong by outsiders.

John's parents had divorced when John was five. He and his younger sister lived with his financially struggling mother. The mother had a live-in boyfriend that she married when John was in high school. The Asian step father was helpful in getting John summer jobs and encouraged John to attend the local community college before moving to the four-year university.

Rebecca's maid of honor, Susie, attended college with Rebecca but had dropped out when finding out she was pregnant. She chose not to marry the father and was currently raising the child as a single parent. Working and taking care of the child made college a remote possibility.

The best man, Brad, was in and out of relationships. He was currently seeing a woman with several children of different parentage. The gossip had this relationship lasting about the same amount of time as all the previous encounters.

Rebecca and John had a gay couple as ushers. Steve and Roger had been in a monogamous relationship for almost ten years, had adopted a minority daughter and were starting a web-based business together. It was obvious they both adored their child, and they planned on being married at a Washington destination ceremony later in the year.

This scenario may be complicated, but it is representative of the many types of families in today's society.

Between 2006 and 2010, nearly half of heterosexual women (48 percent) ages fifteen to forty-four said they were not married to their spouse or partner when they first lived with them, the report says. That's up from 43 percent in 2002, and 34 percent in 1995 (Rettner 2013). The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the number of unmarried couples has grown from fewer



than one million in the 1970s to 8.1 million in 2011. Cohabiting, but unwed, couples account for 10 percent of all opposite-sex couples in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). Some may never choose to wed (Gardner 2013). With fewer couples marrying, the traditional U.S. family structure is becoming less common.

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## What Is Marriage? What Is a Family?

- Describe society's current understanding of family
- Recognize changes in marriage and family patterns
- Differentiate between lines of descent and residence



The modern concept of family is far more encompassing than in past decades. What do you think constitutes a family? (Photo (a) courtesy Gareth Williams/flickr; photo (b) courtesy Guillaume Paumier/ Wikimedia Commons)

Marriage and family are key structures in most societies. While the two institutions have historically been closely linked in U.S. culture, their connection is becoming more complex. The relationship between marriage and family is an interesting topic of study to sociologists.

What is marriage? Different people define it in different ways. Not even sociologists are able to agree on a single meaning. For our purposes, we'll define **marriage** as a legally recognized social contract between two people, traditionally based on a sexual relationship and implying a permanence of the union. In practicing cultural relativism, we should also consider variations, such as whether a legal union is required (think of "common law" marriage and its equivalents), or whether more than two

people can be involved (consider polygamy). Other variations on the definition of marriage might include whether spouses are of opposite sexes or the same sex and how one of the traditional expectations of marriage (to produce children) is understood today.

Sociologists are interested in the relationship between the institution of marriage and the institution of family because, historically, marriages are what create a family, and families are the most basic social unit upon which society is built. Both marriage and family create status roles that are sanctioned by society.

So what is a family? A husband, a wife, and two children—maybe even a pet—has served as the model for the traditional U.S. family for most of the twentieth century. But what about families that deviate from this model, such as a single-parent household or a homosexual couple without children? Should they be considered families as well?

The question of what constitutes a family is a prime area of debate in family sociology, as well as in politics and religion. Social conservatives tend to define the family in terms of structure with each family member filling a certain role (like father, mother, or child). Sociologists, on the other hand, tend to define family more in terms of the manner in which members relate to one another than on a strict configuration of status roles. Here, we'll define **family** as a socially recognized group (usually joined by blood, marriage, cohabitation, or adoption) that forms an emotional connection and serves as an economic unit of society. Sociologists identify different types of families based on how one enters into them. A **family of orientation** refers to the family into which a person is born. A **family of procreation** describes one that is formed through marriage. These distinctions have cultural significance related to issues of lineage.

Drawing on two sociological paradigms, the sociological understanding of what constitutes a family can be explained by symbolic interactionism as well as functionalism. These two theories indicate that families are groups in which participants view themselves as family members and act accordingly. In other words, families are groups in which people come together to form a strong primary group connection and maintain emotional ties to one another over a long period of time. Such families may include

groups of close friends or teammates. In addition, the functionalist perspective views families as groups that perform vital roles for society—both internally (for the family itself) and externally (for society as a whole). Families provide for one another's physical, emotional, and social well-being. Parents care for and socialize children. Later in life, adult children often care for elderly parents. While interactionism helps us understand the subjective experience of belonging to a “family,” functionalism illuminates the many purposes of families and their roles in the maintenance of a balanced society (Parsons and Bales 1956). We will go into more detail about how these theories apply to family in.

## **Challenges Families Face**

People in the United States as a whole are somewhat divided when it comes to determining what does and what does not constitute a family. In a 2010 survey conducted by professors at the University of Indiana, nearly all participants (99.8 percent) agreed that a husband, wife, and children constitute a family. Ninety-two percent stated that a husband and a wife without children still constitute a family. The numbers drop for less traditional structures: unmarried couples with children (83 percent), unmarried couples without children (39.6 percent), gay male couples with children (64 percent), and gay male couples without children (33 percent) (Powell et al. 2010). This survey revealed that children tend to be the key indicator in establishing “family” status: the percentage of individuals who agreed that unmarried couples and gay couples constitute a family nearly doubled when children were added.

The study also revealed that 60 percent of U.S. respondents agreed that if you consider yourself a family, you are a family (a concept that reinforces an interactionist perspective) (Powell 2010). The government, however, is not so flexible in its definition of “family.” The U.S. Census Bureau defines a family as “a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together” (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). While this structured definition can be used as a means to consistently track family-related patterns over several years, it excludes individuals such as cohabitating unmarried heterosexual and homosexual couples. Legality aside, sociologists would argue that the

general concept of family is more diverse and less structured than in years past. Society has given more leeway to the design of a family making room for what works for its members (Jayson 2010).

Family is, indeed, a subjective concept, but it is a fairly objective fact that family (whatever one's concept of it may be) is very important to people in the United States. In a 2010 survey by Pew Research Center in Washington, DC, 76 percent of adults surveyed stated that family is “the most important” element of their life—just one percent said it was “not important” (Pew Research Center 2010). It is also very important to society. President Ronald Reagan notably stated, “The family has always been the cornerstone of American society. Our families nurture, preserve, and pass on to each succeeding generation the values we share and cherish, values that are the foundation of our freedoms” (Lee 2009). While the design of the family may have changed in recent years, the fundamentals of emotional closeness and support are still present. Most responders to the Pew survey stated that their family today is at least as close (45 percent) or closer (40 percent) than the family with which they grew up (Pew Research Center 2010).

Alongside the debate surrounding what constitutes a family is the question of what people in the United States believe constitutes a marriage. Many religious and social conservatives believe that marriage can only exist between a man and a woman, citing religious scripture and the basics of human reproduction as support. Social liberals and progressives, on the other hand, believe that marriage can exist between two consenting adults—be they a man and a woman, or a woman and a woman—and that it would be discriminatory to deny such a couple the civil, social, and economic benefits of marriage.

## **Marriage Patterns**

With single parenting and **cohabitation** (when a couple shares a residence but not a marriage) becoming more acceptable in recent years, people may be less motivated to get married. In a recent survey, 39 percent of respondents answered “yes” when asked whether marriage is becoming obsolete (Pew Research Center 2010). The institution of marriage is likely to continue, but some previous patterns of marriage will become outdated

as new patterns emerge. In this context, cohabitation contributes to the phenomenon of people getting married for the first time at a later age than was typical in earlier generations (Glezer 1991). Furthermore, marriage will continue to be delayed as more people place education and career ahead of “settling down.”

## One Partner or Many?

People in the United States typically equate marriage with **monogamy**, when someone is married to only one person at a time. In many countries and cultures around the world, however, having one spouse is not the only form of marriage. In a majority of cultures (78 percent), **polygamy**, or being married to more than one person at a time, is accepted (Murdock 1967), with most polygamous societies existing in northern Africa and east Asia (Altman and Ginat 1996). Instances of polygamy are almost exclusively in the form of polygyny. **Polygyny** refers to a man being married to more than one woman at the same time. The reverse, when a woman is married to more than one man at the same time, is called **polyandry**. It is far less common and only occurs in about 1 percent of the world’s cultures (Altman and Ginat 1996). The reasons for the overwhelming prevalence of polygamous societies are varied but they often include issues of population growth, religious ideologies, and social status.

While the majority of societies accept polygyny, the majority of people do not practice it. Often fewer than 10 percent (and no more than 25–35 percent) of men in polygamous cultures have more than one wife; these husbands are often older, wealthy, high-status men (Altman and Ginat 1996). The average plural marriage involves no more than three wives. Negev Bedouin men in Israel, for example, typically have two wives, although it is acceptable to have up to four (Grilver 2008). As urbanization increases in these cultures, polygamy is likely to decrease as a result of greater access to mass media, technology, and education (Altman and Ginat 1996).

In the United States, polygamy is considered by most to be socially unacceptable and it is illegal. The act of entering into marriage while still

married to another person is referred to as **bigamy** and is considered a felony in most states. Polygamy in the United States is often associated with those of the Mormon faith, although in 1890 the Mormon Church officially renounced polygamy. Fundamentalist Mormons, such as those in the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS), on the other hand, still hold tightly to the historic Mormon beliefs and practices and allow polygamy in their sect.

The prevalence of polygamy among Mormons is often overestimated due to sensational media stories such as the Yearning for Zion ranch raid in Texas in 2008 and popular television shows such as HBO's *Big Love* and TLC's *Sister Wives*. It is estimated that there are about 37,500 fundamentalist Mormons involved in polygamy in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, but that number has shown a steady decrease in the last 100 years (Useem 2007).

U.S. Muslims, however, are an emerging group with an estimated 20,000 practicing polygamy. Again, polygamy among U.S. Muslims is uncommon and occurs only in approximately 1 percent of the population (Useem 2007). For now polygamy among U.S. Muslims has gone fairly unnoticed by mainstream society, but like fundamentalist Mormons whose practices were off the public's radar for decades, they may someday find themselves at the center of social debate.



Joseph Smith, Jr.,  
the founder of  
Mormonism, is said  
to have practiced  
polygamy. (Photo  
courtesy of public  
domain/Wikimedia  
Commons)

## Residency and Lines of Descent

When considering one's lineage, most people in the United States look to both their father's and mother's sides. Both paternal and maternal ancestors are considered part of one's family. This pattern of tracing kinship is called **bilateral descent**. Note that **kinship**, or one's traceable ancestry, can be based on blood or marriage or adoption. Sixty percent of societies, mostly modernized nations, follow a bilateral descent pattern. **Unilateral descent** (the tracing of kinship through one parent only) is practiced in the other 40 percent of the world's societies, with high concentration in pastoral cultures (O'Neal 2006).



There are three types of unilateral descent: **patrilineal**, which follows the father's line only; **matrilineal**, which follows the mother's side only; and **ambilineal**, which follows either the father's only or the mother's side only, depending on the situation. In patrilineal societies, such as those in rural China and India, only males carry on the family surname. This gives males the prestige of permanent family membership while females are seen as only temporary members (Harrell 2001). U.S. society assumes some aspects of patrilineal descent. For instance, most children assume their father's last name even if the mother retains her birth name.

In matrilineal societies, inheritance and family ties are traced to women. Matrilineal descent is common in Native American societies, notably the Crow and Cherokee tribes. In these societies, children are seen as belonging to the women and, therefore, one's kinship is traced to one's mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and so on (Mails 1996). In ambilineal societies, which are most common in Southeast Asian countries, parents may choose to associate their children with the kinship of either the mother or the father. This choice may be based on the desire to follow stronger or more prestigious kinship lines or on cultural customs such as men following their father's side and women following their mother's side (Lambert 2009).

Tracing one's line of descent to one parent rather than the other can be relevant to the issue of residence. In many cultures, newly married couples move in with, or near to, family members. In a **patrilocal residence** system it is customary for the wife to live with (or near) her husband's blood relatives (or family or orientation). Patrilocal systems can be traced back thousands of years. In a DNA analysis of 4,600-year-old bones found in Germany, scientists found indicators of patrilocal living arrangements (Haak et al 2008). Patrilocal residence is thought to be disadvantageous to women because it makes them outsiders in the home and community; it also keeps them disconnected from their own blood relatives. In China, where patrilocal and patrilineal customs are common, the written symbols for maternal grandmother (*wáipá*) are separately translated to mean "outsider" and "women" (Cohen 2011).

Similarly, in **matrilocal residence** systems, where it is customary for the husband to live with his wife's blood relatives (or her family of orientation), the husband can feel disconnected and can be labeled as an outsider. The Minangkabau people, a matrilineal society that is indigenous to the highlands of West Sumatra in Indonesia, believe that home is the place of women and they give men little power in issues relating to the home or family (Joseph and Najmabadi 2003). Most societies that use patrilineal and patrilineal systems are patriarchal, but very few societies that use matrilineal and matrilineal systems are matriarchal, as family life is often considered an important part of the culture for women, regardless of their power relative to men.

## Stages of Family Life

As we've established, the concept of family has changed greatly in recent decades. Historically, it was often thought that many families evolved through a series of predictable stages. Developmental or "stage" theories used to play a prominent role in family sociology (Strong and DeVault 1992). Today, however, these models have been criticized for their linear and conventional assumptions as well as for their failure to capture the diversity of family forms. While reviewing some of these once-popular theories, it is important to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

The set of predictable steps and patterns families experience over time is referred to as the **family life cycle**. One of the first designs of the family life cycle was developed by Paul Glick in 1955. In Glick's original design, he asserted that most people will grow up, establish families, rear and launch their children, experience an "empty nest" period, and come to the end of their lives. This cycle will then continue with each subsequent generation (Glick 1989). Glick's colleague, Evelyn Duvall, elaborated on the family life cycle by developing these classic stages of family (Strong and DeVault 1992):

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<b>Stage</b>	<b>Family Type</b>	<b>Children</b>
1	Marriage Family	Childless
2	Procreation Family	Children ages 0 to 2.5
3	Preschooler Family	Children ages 2.5 to 6
4	School-age Family	Children ages 6–13
5	Teenage Family	Children ages 13–20
6	Launching Family	Children begin to leave home
7	Empty Nest Family	“Empty nest”; adult children have left home

**Stage Theory** This table shows one example of how a “stage” theory might categorize the phases a family goes through.

The family life cycle was used to explain the different processes that occur in families over time. Sociologists view each stage as having its own structure with different challenges, achievements, and accomplishments that transition the family from one stage to the next. For example, the problems and challenges that a family experiences in Stage 1 as a married couple with no children are likely much different than those experienced in Stage 5 as a married couple with teenagers. The success of a family can be measured by how well they adapt to these challenges and transition into each stage. While sociologists use the family life cycle to study the dynamics of family over time, consumer and marketing researchers have used it to determine what goods and services families need as they progress through each stage (Murphy and Staples 1979).

As early “stage” theories have been criticized for generalizing family life and not accounting for differences in gender, ethnicity, culture, and lifestyle, less rigid models of the family life cycle have been developed. One example is the **family life course**, which recognizes the events that occur in the lives of families but views them as parting terms of a fluid course rather than in consecutive stages (Strong and DeVault 1992). This type of model accounts for changes in family development, such as the fact that in today’s society, childbearing does not always occur with marriage. It also sheds light on other shifts in the way family life is practiced. Society’s modern understanding of family rejects rigid “stage” theories and is more accepting of new, fluid models.

**Note:**

**The Evolution of Television Families**

Whether you grew up watching the Cleavers, the Waltons, the Huxtables, or the Simpsons, most of the iconic families you saw in television sitcoms included a father, a mother, and children cavorting under the same roof while comedy ensued. The 1960s was the height of the suburban U.S. nuclear family on television with shows such as *The Donna Reed Show* and *Father Knows Best*. While some shows of this era portrayed single parents (*My Three Sons* and *Bonanza*, for instance), the single status almost always resulted from being widowed—not divorced or unwed.

Although family dynamics in real U.S. homes were changing, the expectations for families portrayed on television were not. The United States’ first reality show, *An American Family* (which aired on PBS in 1973) chronicled Bill and Pat Loud and their children as a “typical” U.S. family. During the series, the oldest son, Lance, announced to the family that he was gay, and at the series’ conclusion, Bill and Pat decided to divorce. Although the Loud’s union was among the 30 percent of marriages that ended in divorce in 1973, the family was featured on the cover of the March 12 issue of *Newsweek* with the title “The Broken Family” (Ruoff 2002).

Less traditional family structures in sitcoms gained popularity in the 1980s with shows such as *Diff’rent Strokes* (a widowed man with two adopted African American sons) and *One Day at a Time* (a divorced woman with

two teenage daughters). Still, traditional families such as those in *Family Ties* and *The Cosby Show* dominated the ratings. The late 1980s and the 1990s saw the introduction of the dysfunctional family. Shows such as *Roseanne*, *Married with Children*, and *The Simpsons* portrayed traditional nuclear families, but in a much less flattering light than those from the 1960s did (Museum of Broadcast Communications 2011).

Over the past ten years, the nontraditional family has become somewhat of a tradition in television. While most situation comedies focus on single men and women without children, those that do portray families often stray from the classic structure: they include unmarried and divorced parents, adopted children, gay couples, and multigenerational households. Even those that do feature traditional family structures may show less-traditional characters in supporting roles, such as the brothers in the highly rated shows *Everybody Loves Raymond* and *Two and Half Men*. Even wildly popular children's programs as Disney's *Hannah Montana* and *The Suite Life of Zack & Cody* feature single parents.

In 2009, ABC premiered an intensely nontraditional family with the broadcast of *Modern Family*. The show follows an extended family that includes a divorced and remarried father with one stepchild, and his biological adult children—one of who is in a traditional two-parent household, and the other who is a gay man in a committed relationship raising an adopted daughter. While this dynamic may be more complicated than the typical “modern” family, its elements may resonate with many of today's viewers. “The families on the shows aren't as idealistic, but they remain relatable,” states television critic Maureen Ryan. “The most successful shows, comedies especially, have families that you can look at and see parts of your family in them” (Respers France 2010).

## Summary

Sociologists view marriage and families as societal institutions that help create the basic unit of social structure. Both marriage and a family may be defined differently—and practiced differently—in cultures across the world. Families and marriages, like other institutions, adapt to social change.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Sociologists tend to define family in terms of

- a. how a given society sanctions the relationships of people who are connected through blood, marriage, or adoption
- b. the connection of bloodlines
- c. the status roles that exist in a family structure
- d. how closely members adhere to social norms

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

### Exercise:

**Problem:**

Research suggests that people generally feel that their current family is \_\_\_\_\_ than the family they grew up with.

- a. less close
- b. more close
- c. at least as close
- d. none of the above

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

### Exercise:

**Problem:**

A woman being married to two men would be an example of:

- a. monogamy
- b. polygyny
- c. polyandry
- d. cohabitation

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

A child who associates his line of descent with his father's side only is part of a \_\_\_\_\_ society.

- a. matrilocal
- b. bilateral
- c. matrilineal
- d. patrilineal

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following is a criticism of the family life cycle model?

- a. It is too broad and accounts for too many aspects of family.

- b. It is too narrowly focused on a sequence of stages.
- c. It does not serve a practical purpose for studying family behavior.
- d. It is not based on comprehensive research.

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

### Short Answer

#### Exercise:

**Problem:**

According to research, what are people's general thoughts on family in the United States? How do they view nontraditional family structures? How do you think these views might change in twenty years?

#### Exercise:

**Problem:**

Explain the difference between bilateral and unilateral descent. Using your own association with kinship, explain which type of descent applies to you?

### Further Research

For more information on family development and lines of descent, visit the New England Historical Genealogical Society's web site, American Ancestors, and find out how genealogies have been established and recorded since 1845. [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/American\\_Ancestors](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/American_Ancestors)



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## Glossary

### ambilineal

a type of unilateral descent that follows either the father's or the mother's side exclusively

### bilateral descent

the tracing of kinship through both parents' ancestral lines

### bigamy

the act of entering into marriage while still married to another person

### cohabitation

the act of a couple sharing a residence while they are not married

### family

socially recognized groups of individuals who may be joined by blood, marriage, or adoption and who form an emotional connection and an economic unit of society

### family life course

a sociological model of family that sees the progression of events as fluid rather than as occurring in strict stages

### family life cycle

a set of predictable steps and patterns families experience over time

family of orientation

the family into which one is born

family of procreation

a family that is formed through marriage

kinship

a person's traceable ancestry (by blood, marriage, and/or adoption)

marriage

a legally recognized contract between two or more people in a sexual relationship who have an expectation of permanence about their relationship

matrilineal descent

a type of unilateral descent that follows the mother's side only

matrilocal residence

a system in which it is customary for a husband to live with the his wife's family

monogamy

the act of being married to only one person at a time

patrilineal descent

a type of unilateral descent that follows the father's line only

patrilocal residence

a system in which it is customary for the a wife to live with (or near) the her husband's family

polyandry

a form of marriage in which one woman is married to more than one man at one time

polygamy

the state of being committed or married to more than one person at a time

polygyny

a form of marriage in which one man is married to more than one woman at one time

unilateral descent

the tracing of kinship through one parent only.

## Variations in Family Life

- Recognize variations in family life
- Understand the prevalence of single parents, cohabitation, same-sex couples, and unmarried individuals
- Discuss the social impact of changing family structures

The combination of husband, wife, and children that 99.8 percent of people in the United States believe constitutes a family is not representative of 99.8 percent of U.S. families. According to 2010 census data, only 66 percent of children under seventeen years old live in a household with two married parents. This is a decrease from 77 percent in 1980 (U.S. Census 2011). This two-parent family structure is known as a **nuclear family**, referring to married parents and children as the nucleus, or core, of the group. Recent years have seen a rise in variations of the nuclear family with the parents not being married. Three percent of children live with two cohabiting parents (U.S. Census 2011).



More than one quarter of U.S. children live in a single-parent household. (Photo courtesy of Ross Griff/flickr)

## Single Parents

Single-parent households are on the rise. In 2010, 27 percent of children lived with a single parent only, up from 25 percent in 2008. Of that 27 percent, 23 percent live with their mother and three percent live with their father. Ten percent of children living with their single mother and 20 percent of children living with their single father also live with the cohabitating partner of their parent (for example, boyfriends or girlfriends).

Stepparents are an additional family element in two-parent homes. Among children living in two-parent households, 9 percent live with a biological or adoptive parent and a stepparent. The majority (70 percent) of those children live with their biological mother and a stepfather. Family structure has been shown to vary with the age of the child. Older children (fifteen to seventeen years old) are less likely to live with two parents than adolescent children (six to fourteen years old) or young children (zero to five years old). Older children who do live with two parents are also more likely to live with stepparents (U.S. Census 2011).

In some family structures a parent is not present at all. In 2010, three million children (4 percent of all children) lived with a guardian who was neither their biological nor adoptive parent. Of these children, 54 percent live with grandparents, 21 percent live with other relatives, and 24 percent live with nonrelatives. This family structure is referred to as the **extended family**, and may include aunts, uncles, and cousins living in the same home. Foster parents account for about a quarter of nonrelatives. The practice of grandparents acting as parents, whether alone or in combination with the child's parent, is becoming widespread among today's families (De Toledo and Brown 1995). Nine percent of all children live with a grandparent, and in nearly half those cases, the grandparent maintains primary responsibility for the child (U.S. Census 2011). A grandparent functioning as the primary care provider often results from parental drug abuse, incarceration, or abandonment. Events like these can render the parent incapable of caring for his or her child.

Changes in the traditional family structure raise questions about how such societal shifts affect children. U.S. Census statistics have long shown that children living in homes with both parents grow up with more financial and educational advantages than children who are raised in single-parent homes (U.S. Census 1997). Parental marital status seems to be a significant indicator of advancement in a child's life. Children living with a divorced parent typically have more advantages than children living with a parent who never married; this is particularly true of children who live with divorced fathers. This correlates with the statistic that never-married parents are typically younger, have fewer years of schooling, and have lower incomes (U.S. Census 1997). Six in ten children living with only their mother live near or below the poverty level. Of those being raised by single mothers, 69 percent live in or near poverty compared to 45 percent for divorced mothers (U.S. Census 1997). Though other factors such as age and education play a role in these differences, it can be inferred that marriage between parents is generally beneficial for children.

## **Cohabitation**

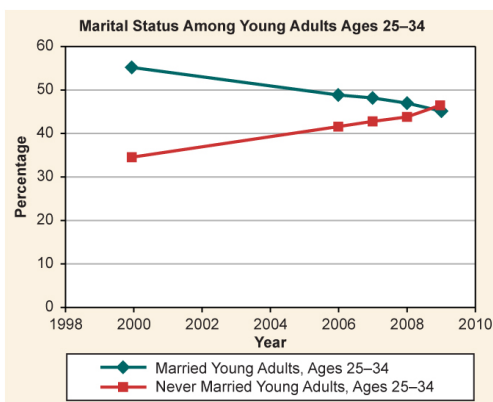
Living together before or in lieu of marriage is a growing option for many couples. Cohabitation, when a man and woman live together in a sexual relationship without being married, was practiced by an estimated 7.5 million people (11.5 percent of the population) in 2011, which shows an increase of 13 percent since 2009 (U.S. Census 2010). This surge in cohabitation is likely due to the decrease in social stigma pertaining to the practice. In a 2010 National Center for Health Statistics survey, only 38 percent of the 13,000-person sample thought that cohabitation negatively impacted society (Jayson 2010). Of those who cohabit, the majority are non-Hispanic with no high school diploma or GED and grew up in a single-parent household (U.S. Census 2010).

Cohabiting couples may choose to live together in an effort to spend more time together or to save money on living costs. Many couples view cohabitation as a "trial run" for marriage. Today, approximately 28 percent of men and women cohabitated before their first marriage. By comparison, 18 percent of men and 23 percent of women married without ever cohabitating (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). The vast majority of cohabitating



relationships eventually result in marriage; only 15 percent of men and women cohabit only and do not marry. About one half of cohabitators transition into marriage within three years (U.S. Census 2010).

While couples may use this time to “work out the kinks” of a relationship before they wed, the most recent research has found that cohabitation has little effect on the success of a marriage. In fact, those who do not cohabit before marriage have slightly better rates of remaining married for more than ten years (Jayson 2010). Cohabitation may contribute to the increase in the number of men and women who delay marriage. The median age for marriage is the highest it has ever been since the U.S. Census kept records—age twenty-six for women and age twenty-eight for men (U.S. Census 2010).



As shown by this graph of marital status percentages among young adults, more young people are choosing to delay or opt out of marriage. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census and American Community Survey)

## Same-Sex Couples

The number of same-sex couples has grown significantly in the past decade. The U.S. Census Bureau reported 594,000 same-sex couple households in the United States, a 50 percent increase from 2000. This increase is a result of more coupling, the growing social acceptance of homosexuality, and a subsequent increase in willingness to report it. Nationally, same-sex couple households make up 1 percent of the population, ranging from as little as 0.29 percent in Wyoming to 4.01 percent in the District of Columbia (U.S. Census 2011). Legal recognition of same-sex couples as spouses is different in each state, as only six states and the District of Columbia have legalized same-sex marriage. The 2010 U.S. Census, however, allowed same-sex couples to report as spouses regardless of whether their state legally recognizes their relationship. Nationally, 25 percent of all same-sex households reported that they were spouses. In states where same-sex marriages are performed, nearly half (42.4 percent) of same-sex couple households were reported as spouses.

In terms of demographics, same-sex couples are not very different from opposite-sex couples. Same-sex couple households have an average age of 52 and an average household income of \$91,558; opposite-sex couple households have an average age of 59 and an average household income of \$95,075. Additionally, 31 percent of same-sex couples are raising children, not far from the 43 percent of opposite-sex couples (U.S. Census 2009). Of the children in same-sex couple households, 73 percent are biological children (of only one of the parents), 21 percent are adopted only, and 6 percent are a combination of biological and adopted (U.S. Census 2009).

While there is some concern from socially conservative groups regarding the well-being of children who grow up in same-sex households, research reports that same-sex parents are as effective as opposite-sex parents. In an analysis of 81 parenting studies, sociologists found no quantifiable data to support the notion that opposite-sex parenting is any better than same-sex parenting. Children of lesbian couples, however, were shown to have slightly lower rates of behavioral problems and higher rates of self-esteem (Biblarz and Stacey 2010).

## Staying Single

Gay or straight, a new option for many people in the United States is simply to stay single. In 2010, there were 99.6 million unmarried individuals over age eighteen in the United States, accounting for 44 percent of the total adult population (U.S. Census 2011). In 2010, never-married individuals in the twenty-five to twenty-nine age bracket accounted for 62 percent of women and 48 percent of men, up from 11 percent and 19 percent, respectively, in 1970 (U.S. Census 2011). Single, or never-married, individuals are found in higher concentrations in large cities or metropolitan areas, with New York City being one of the highest.

Although both single men and single women report social pressure to get married, women are subject to greater scrutiny. Single women are often portrayed as unhappy “spinsters” or “old maids” who cannot find a man to marry them. Single men, on the other hand, are typically portrayed as lifetime bachelors who cannot settle down or simply “have not found the right girl.” Single women report feeling insecure and displaced in their families when their single status is disparaged (Roberts 2007). However, single women older than thirty-five years old report feeling secure and happy with their unmarried status, as many women in this category have found success in their education and careers. In general, women feel more independent and more prepared to live a large portion of their adult lives without a spouse or domestic partner than they did in the 1960s (Roberts 2007).

The decision to marry or not to marry can be based a variety of factors including religion and cultural expectations. Asian individuals are the most likely to marry while African Americans are the least likely to marry (Venugopal 2011). Additionally, individuals who place no value on religion are more likely to be unmarried than those who place a high value on religion. For black women, however, the importance of religion made no difference in marital status (Bakalar 2010). In general, being single is not a rejection of marriage; rather, it is a lifestyle that does not necessarily include marriage. By age forty, according to census figures, 20 percent of women and 14 of men will have never married (U.S. Census Bureau 2011).



More and more people in the United States are choosing lifestyles that don't include marriage. (Photo courtesy of Glenn Harper/flickr)

**Note:**

**Deceptive Divorce Rates**

It is often cited that half of all marriages end in divorce. This statistic has made many people cynical when it comes to marriage, but it is misleading. Let's take a closer look at the data.

Using National Center for Health Statistics data from 2003 that show a marriage rate of 7.5 (per 1000 people) and a divorce rate of 3.8, it would appear that exactly one half of all marriages failed (Hurley 2005). This reasoning is deceptive, however, because instead of tracing actual marriages to see their longevity (or lack thereof), this compares what are unrelated statistics: that is, the number of marriages in a given year does not have a direct correlation to the divorces occurring that same year.

Research published in the *New York Times* took a different approach—determining how many people had ever been married, and of those, how many later divorced. The result? According to this analysis, U.S. divorce rates have only gone as high as 41 percent (Hurley 2005). Another way to calculate divorce rates would be through a cohort study. For instance, we could determine the percentage of marriages that are intact after, say, five

or seven years, compared to marriages that have ended in divorce after five or seven years. Sociological researchers must remain aware of research methods and how statistical results are applied. As illustrated, different methodologies and different interpretations can lead to contradictory, and even misleading, results.

## **Theoretical Perspectives on Marriage and Family**

Sociologists study families on both the macro and micro level to determine how families function. Sociologists may use a variety of theoretical perspectives to explain events that occur within and outside of the family.

### **Functionalism**

When considering the role of family in society, functionalists uphold the notion that families are an important social institution and that they play a key role in stabilizing society. They also note that family members take on status roles in a marriage or family. The family—and its members—perform certain functions that facilitate the prosperity and development of society.

Sociologist George Murdock conducted a survey of 250 societies and determined that there are four universal residual functions of the family: sexual, reproductive, educational, and economic (Lee 1985). According to Murdock, the family (which for him includes the state of marriage) regulates sexual relations between individuals. He does not deny the existence or impact of premarital or extramarital sex, but states that the family offers a socially legitimate sexual outlet for adults (Lee 1985). This outlet gives way to reproduction, which is a necessary part of ensuring the survival of society.

Once children are produced, the family plays a vital role in training them for adult life. As the primary agent of socialization and enculturation, the family teaches young children the ways of thinking and behaving that

follow social and cultural norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes. Parents teach their children manners and civility. A well-mannered child reflects a well-mannered parent.

Parents also teach children gender roles. Gender roles are an important part of the economic function of a family. In each family, there is a division of labor that consists of instrumental and expressive roles. Men tend to assume the instrumental roles in the family, which typically involve work outside of the family that provides financial support and establishes family status. Women tend to assume the expressive roles, which typically involve work inside of the family which provides emotional support and physical care for children (Crano and Aronoff 1978). According to functionalists, the differentiation of the roles on the basis of sex ensures that families are well balanced and coordinated. When family members move outside of these roles, the family is thrown out of balance and must recalibrate in order to function properly. For example, if the father assumes an expressive role such as providing daytime care for the children, the mother must take on an instrumental role such as gaining paid employment outside of the home in order for the family to maintain balance and function.

## **Conflict Theory**

Conflict theorists are quick to point out that U.S. families have been defined as private entities, the consequence of which has been to leave family matters to only those within the family. Many people in the United States are resistant to government intervention in the family: parents do not want the government to tell them how to raise their children or to become involved in domestic issues. Conflict theory highlights the role of power in family life and contends that the family is often not a haven but rather an arena where power struggles can occur. This exercise of power often entails the performance of family status roles. Conflict theorists may study conflicts as simple as the enforcement of rules from parent to child, or they may examine more serious issues such as domestic violence (spousal and child), sexual assault, marital rape, and incest.

The first study of marital power was performed in 1960. Researchers found that the person with the most access to valuable resources held the most power. As money is one of the most valuable resources, men who worked in paid labor outside of the home held more power than women who worked inside the home (Blood and Wolfe 1960). Conflict theorists find disputes over the division of household labor to be a common source of marital discord. Household labor offers no wages and, therefore, no power. Studies indicate that when men do more housework, women experience more satisfaction in their marriages, reducing the incidence of conflict (Coltrane 2000). In general, conflict theorists tend to study areas of marriage and life that involve inequalities or discrepancies in power and authority, as they are reflective of the larger social structure.

## **Symbolic Interactionism**

Interactionists view the world in terms of symbols and the meanings assigned to them (LaRossa and Reitzes 1993). The family itself is a symbol. To some, it is a father, mother, and children; to others, it is any union that involves respect and compassion. Interactionists stress that family is not an objective, concrete reality. Like other social phenomena, it is a social construct that is subject to the ebb and flow of social norms and ever-changing meanings.

Consider the meaning of other elements of family: “parent” was a symbol of a biological and emotional connection to a child; with more parent-child relationships developing through adoption, remarriage, or change in guardianship, the word “parent” today is less likely to be associated with a biological connection than with whoever is socially recognized as having the responsibility for a child’s upbringing. Similarly, the terms “mother” and “father” are no longer rigidly associated with the meanings of caregiver and breadwinner. These meanings are more free-flowing through changing family roles.

Interactionists also recognize how the family status roles of each member are socially constructed, playing an important part in how people perceive and interpret social behavior. Interactionists view the family as a group of

role players or “actors” that come together to act out their parts in an effort to construct a family. These roles are up for interpretation. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a “good father,” for example, was one who worked hard to provide financial security for his children. Today, a “good father” is one who takes the time outside of work to promote his children’s emotional well-being, social skills, and intellectual growth—in some ways, a much more daunting task.

## Summary

People's concepts of marriage and family in the United States are changing. Increases in cohabitation, same-sex partners, and singlehood are altering of our ideas of marriage. Similarly, single parents, same-sex parents, cohabitating parents, and unwed parents are changing our notion of what it means to be a family. While most children still live in opposite-sex, two-parent, married households, that is no longer viewed as the only type of nuclear family.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** The majority of U.S. children live in:

- a. two-parent households
- b. one-parent households
- c. no-parent households
- d. multigenerational households

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A



**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

According to the study cited by the U.S. Census Bureau, children who live with married parents grow up with more advantages than children who live with:

- a. a divorced parent
- b. a single parent
- c. a grandparent
- d. all of the above

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Couples who cohabitate before marriage are \_\_\_\_\_ couples who did not cohabitate before marriage to be married at least ten years.

- a. far more likely than
- b. far less likely than
- c. slightly less likely than
- d. equally as likely as

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Same-sex couple households account for \_\_\_\_\_ percent of U.S. households.

- a. 1
- b. 10
- c. 15
- d. 30

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A

**Exercise:****Problem:**

The median age of first marriage has \_\_\_\_\_ in the last fifty years.

- a. increased for men but not women
- b. decreased for men but not women
- c. increased for both men and women
- d. decreased for both men and women

---

**Solution:****Answers**

C

**Short Answer****Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Explain the different variations of the nuclear family and the trends that occur in each.

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Why are some couples choosing to cohabitate before marriage? What effect does cohabitation have on marriage?

**Further Research**

For more statistics on marriage and family, see the Forum on Child and Family Statistics at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/child\\_family\\_statistics](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/child_family_statistics), as well as the American Community Survey, the Current Population Survey, and the U.S. Census decennial survey at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/US\\_Census](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/US_Census).

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## **Glossary**

### **extended family**

a household that includes at least one parent and child as well as other relatives like grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins

### **nuclear family**

two parents (traditionally a married husband and wife) and children living in the same household

## Challenges Families Face

- Understand the social and interpersonal impact of divorce
- Describe the social and interpersonal impact of family abuse

As the structure of family changes over time, so do the challenges families face. Events like divorce and remarriage present new difficulties for families and individuals. Other long-standing domestic issues such as abuse continue to strain the health and stability of today's families.

## Divorce and Remarriage

Divorce, while fairly common and accepted in modern U.S. society, was once a word that would only be whispered and was accompanied by gestures of disapproval. In 1960, divorce was generally uncommon, affecting only 9.1 out of every 1,000 married persons. That number more than doubled (to 20.3) by 1975 and peaked in 1980 at 22.6 (Popenoe 2007). Over the last quarter century, divorce rates have dropped steadily and are now similar to those in 1970. The dramatic increase in divorce rates after the 1960s has been associated with the liberalization of divorce laws, as well as the shift in societal makeup due to women increasingly entering the workforce (Michael 1978). The decrease in divorce rates can be attributed to two probable factors: an increase in the age at which people get married, and an increased level of education among those who marry—both of which have been found to promote greater marital stability.

Divorce does not occur equally among all people in the United States; some segments of the U.S. population are more likely to divorce than others. According the American Community Survey (ACS), men and women in the Northeast have the lowest rates of divorce at 7.2 and 7.5 per 1,000 people. The South has the highest rate of divorce at 10.2 for men and 11.1 for women. Divorce rates are likely higher in the South because marriage rates are higher and marriage occurs at younger-than-average ages in this region. In the Northeast, the marriage rate is lower and first marriages tend to be delayed; therefore, the divorce rate is lower (U.S. Census Bureau 2011).

The rate of divorce also varies by race. In a 2009 ACS study, American Indian and Alaskan Natives reported the highest percentages of currently divorced individuals (12.6 percent) followed by blacks (11.5 percent), whites (10.8 percent), Pacific Islanders (8 percent), Latinos (7.8 percent) and Asians (4.9 percent) (ACS 2011). In general those who marry at a later age and have a college education have lower rates of divorce.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Divorces and annulments</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Rate per 1,000 total population</b>
2011 <sup>1</sup>	877,000	246,273,366	3.6
2010 <sup>1</sup>	872,000	244,122,529	3.6
2009 <sup>1</sup>	840,000	242,610,561	3.5
2008 <sup>1</sup>	844,000	240,545,163	3.5
2007 <sup>1</sup>	856,000	238,352,850	3.6
2006 <sup>1</sup>	872,000	236,094,277	3.7
2005 <sup>1</sup>	847,000	233,495,163	3.6
2004 <sup>2</sup>	879,000	236,402,656	3.7
2003 <sup>3</sup>	927,000	243,902,090	3.8
2002 <sup>4</sup>	955,000	243,108,303	3.9
2001 <sup>5</sup>	940,000	236,416,762	4.0

<b>Year</b>	<b>Divorces and annulments</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Rate per 1,000 total population</b>
2000 <sup>5</sup>	944,000	233,550,143	4.0

Provisional number of divorces and annulments and rate: United States, 2000–2011 There has been a steady decrease in divorce over the past decade. (National Center for Health Statistics, CDC)

<sup>1</sup>Excludes data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, and Minnesota.

<sup>2</sup>Excludes data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, and Louisiana.

<sup>3</sup>Excludes data for California, Hawaii, Indiana, and Oklahoma.

<sup>4</sup>Excludes data for California, Indiana, and Oklahoma.

<sup>5</sup>Excludes data for California, Indiana, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.

Note: Rates for 2001–2009 have been revised and are based on intercensal population estimates from the 2000 and 2010 censuses. Populations for 2010 rates are based on the 2010 census.

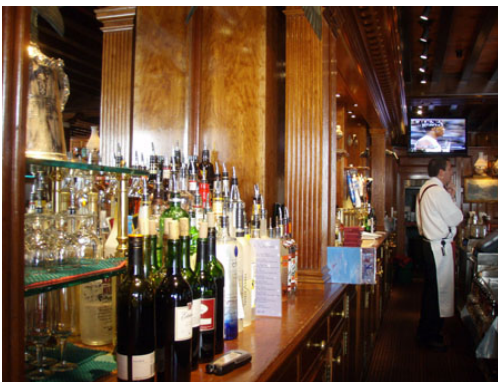
So what causes divorce? While more young people are choosing to postpone or opt out of marriage, those who enter into the union do so with the expectation that it will last. A great deal of marital problems can be related to stress, especially financial stress. According to researchers participating in the University of Virginia's National Marriage Project, couples who enter marriage without a strong asset base (like a home, savings, and a retirement plan) are 70 percent more likely to be divorced after three years than are couples with at least \$10,000 in assets. This is connected to factors such as age and education level that correlate with low incomes.

The addition of children to a marriage creates added financial and emotional stress. Research has established that marriages enter their most stressful phase upon the birth of the first child (Popenoe and Whitehead 2007). This is particularly true for couples who have multiples (twins, triplets, and so on). Married couples with twins or triplets are 17 percent more likely to divorce than those with children from single births (McKay 2010). Another contributor to the likelihood of divorce is a general decline in marital satisfaction over time. As people get older, they may find that



their values and life goals no longer match up with those of their spouse (Popenoe and Whitehead 2004).

Divorce is thought to have a cyclical pattern. Children of divorced parents are 40 percent more likely to divorce than children of married parents. And when we consider children whose parents divorced and then remarried, the likelihood of their own divorce rises to 91 percent (Wolfinger 2005). This might result from being socialized to a mindset that a broken marriage can be replaced rather than repaired (Wolfinger 2005). That sentiment is also reflected in the finding that when both partners of a married couple have been previously divorced, their marriage is 90 percent more likely to end in divorce (Wolfinger 2005).



A study from Radford University indicated that bartenders are among the professions with the highest divorce rates (38.4 percent). Other traditionally low-wage industries (like restaurant service, custodial employment, and factory work) are also associated with higher divorce rates. (Aamodt and McCoy

2010). (Photo courtesy of  
Daniel Lobo/flickr)

People in a second marriage account for approximately 19.3 percent of all married persons, and those who have been married three or more times account for 5.2 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). The vast majority (91 percent) of remarriages occur after divorce; only 9 percent occur after death of a spouse (Kreider 2006). Most men and women remarry within five years of a divorce, with the median length for men (three years) being lower than for women (4.4 years). This length of time has been fairly consistent since the 1950s. The majority of those who remarry are between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four (Kreider 2006). The general pattern of remarriage also shows that whites are more likely to remarry than black Americans.

Marriage the second time around (or third or fourth) can be a very different process than the first. Remarriage lacks many of the classic courtship rituals of a first marriage. In a second marriage, individuals are less likely to deal with issues like parental approval, premarital sex, or desired family size (Elliot 2010). In a survey of households formed by remarriage, a mere 8 percent included only biological children of the remarried couple. Of the 49 percent of homes that include children, 24 percent included only the woman's biological children, 3 percent included only the man's biological children, and 9 percent included a combination of both spouse's children (U.S. Census Bureau 2006).

## **Children of Divorce and Remarriage**

Divorce and remarriage can be stressful on partners and children alike. Divorce is often justified by the notion that children are better off in a divorced family than in a family with parents who do not get along. However, long-term studies determine that to be generally untrue. Research suggests that while marital conflict does not provide an ideal childrearing environment, going through a divorce can be damaging. Children are often

confused and frightened by the threat to their family security. They may feel responsible for the divorce and attempt to bring their parents back together, often by sacrificing their own well-being (Amato 2000). Only in high-conflict homes do children benefit from divorce and the subsequent decrease in conflict. The majority of divorces come out of lower-conflict homes, and children from those homes are more negatively impacted by the stress of the divorce than the stress of unhappiness in the marriage (Amato 2000). Studies also suggest that stress levels for children are not improved when a child acquires a stepfamily through marriage. Although there may be increased economic stability, stepfamilies typically have a high level of interpersonal conflict (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

Children's ability to deal with a divorce may depend on their age. Research has found that divorce may be most difficult for school-aged children, as they are old enough to understand the separation but not old enough to understand the reasoning behind it. Older teenagers are more likely to recognize the conflict that led to the divorce but may still feel fear, loneliness, guilt, and pressure to choose sides. Infants and preschool-age children may suffer the heaviest impact from the loss of routine that the marriage offered (Temke 2006).

Proximity to parents also makes a difference in a child's well-being after divorce. Boys who live or have joint arrangements with their fathers show less aggression than those who are raised by their mothers only. Similarly, girls who live or have joint arrangements with their mothers tend to be more responsible and mature than those who are raised by their fathers only. Nearly three-fourths of the children of parents who are divorced live in a household headed by their mother, leaving many boys without a father figure residing in the home (U.S. Census Bureau 2011b). Still, researchers suggest that a strong parent-child relationship can greatly improve a child's adjustment to divorce (Temke 2006).

There is empirical evidence that divorce has not discouraged children in terms of how they view marriage and family. A blended family has additional stress resulting from yours/mine/ours children. The blended family also has a ex-parent that has different discipline techniques. In a survey conducted by researchers from the University of Michigan, about

three-quarters of high school seniors said it was “extremely important” to have a strong marriage and family life. And over half believed it was “very likely” that they would be in a lifelong marriage (Popenoe and Whitehead 2007). These numbers have continued to climb over the last twenty-five years.

## **Violence and Abuse**

Violence and abuse are among the most disconcerting of the challenges that today’s families face. Abuse can occur between spouses, between parent and child, as well as between other family members. The frequency of violence among families is difficult to determine because many cases of spousal abuse and child abuse go unreported. In any case, studies have shown that abuse (reported or not) has a major impact on families and society as a whole.

## **Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is a significant social problem in the United States. It is often characterized as violence between household or family members, specifically spouses. To include unmarried, cohabitating, and same-sex couples, family sociologists have created the term **intimate partner violence (IPV)**. Women are the primary victims of intimate partner violence. It is estimated that one in four women has experienced some form of IPV in her lifetime (compared to one in seven men) (Catalano 2007). IPV may include physical violence, such as punching, kicking, or other methods of inflicting physical pain; sexual violence, such as rape or other forced sexual acts; threats and intimidation that imply either physical or sexual abuse; and emotional abuse, such as harming another’s sense of self-worth through words or controlling another’s behavior. IPV often starts as emotional abuse and then escalates to other forms or combinations of abuse (Centers for Disease Control 2012).



Thirty percent of women who are murdered are killed by their intimate partner. What does this statistic reveal about societal patterns and norms concerning intimate relationships and gender roles? (Photo courtesy of Kathy Kimpel/flickr)

In 2010, of IPV acts that involved physical actions against women, 57 percent involved physical violence only; 9 percent involved rape and physical violence; 14 percent involved physical violence and stalking; 12 percent involved rape, physical violence, and stalking; and 4 percent involved rape only (CDC 2011). This is vastly different than IPV abuse patterns for men, which show that nearly all (92 percent) physical acts of IPV take the form of physical violence and fewer than 1 percent involve rape alone or in combination (Catalano 2007). IPV affects women at greater rates than men because women often take the passive role in relationships and may become emotionally dependent on their partners. Perpetrators of IPV work to establish and maintain such dependence in order to hold power and control over their victims, making them feel stupid, crazy, or ugly—in some way worthless.

IPV affects different segments of the population at different rates. The rate of IPV for black women (4.6 per 1,000 persons over the age of twelve) is higher than that for white women (3.1). These numbers have been fairly stable for both racial groups over the last ten years. However, the numbers have steadily increased for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives (up to 11.1 for females) (Catalano 2007).

Those who are separated report higher rates of abuse than those with other marital statuses, as conflict is typically higher in those relationships. Similarly, those who are cohabitating are more likely than those who are married to experience IPV (Stets and Straus 1990). Other researchers have found that the rate of IPV doubles for women in low-income disadvantaged areas when compared to IPV experienced by women who reside in more affluent areas (Benson and Fox 2004). Overall, women ages twenty to twenty-four are at the greatest risk of nonfatal abuse (Catalano 2007).

Accurate statistics on IPV are difficult to determine, as it is estimated that more than half of nonfatal IPV goes unreported. It is not until victims choose to report crimes that patterns of abuse are exposed. Most victims studied stated that abuse had occurred for at least two years prior to their first report (Carlson, Harris, and Holden 1999).

Sometimes abuse is reported to police by a third party, but it still may not be confirmed by victims. A study of domestic violence incident reports found that even when confronted by police about abuse, 29 percent of victims denied that abuse occurred. Surprisingly, 19 percent of their assailants were likely to admit to abuse (Felson, Ackerman, and Gallagher 2005). According to the National Criminal Victims Survey, victims cite varied reasons why they are reluctant to report abuse, as shown in the table below.

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<b>Reason Abuse Is Unreported</b>	<b>% Females</b>	<b>% Males</b>
Considered a Private Matter	22	39
Fear of Retaliation	12	5
To Protect the Abuser	14	16
Belief That Police Won't Do Anything	8	8

This chart shows reasons that victims give for why they fail to report abuse to police authorities (Catalano 2007).

Two-thirds of nonfatal IPV occurs inside of the home and approximately 10 percent occurs at the home of the victim's friend or neighbor. The majority of abuse takes place between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., and nearly half (42 percent) involves alcohol or drug use (Catalano 2007). Many perpetrators of IPV blame alcohol or drugs for their abuse, though studies have shown that alcohol and drugs do not cause IPV, they may only lower inhibitions (Hanson 2011). IPV has significant long-term effects on individual victims and on society. Studies have shown that IPV damage extends beyond the direct physical or emotional wounds. Extended IPV has been linked to unemployment among victims, as many have difficulty finding or holding employment. Additionally, nearly all women who report serious domestic problems exhibit symptoms of major depression (Goodwin, Chandler, and Meisel 2003).

Female victims of IPV are also more likely to abuse alcohol or drugs, suffer from eating disorders, and attempt suicide (Silverman et al. 2001). IPV is indeed something that impacts more than just intimate partners. In a survey, 34 percent of respondents said they have witnessed IPV, and 59 percent said that they know a victim personally (Roper Starch Worldwide 1995). Many people want to help IPV victims but are hesitant to intervene because they feel that it is a personal matter or they fear retaliation from the abuser—reasons similar to those of victims who do not report IPV.

## Child Abuse

Children are among the most helpless victims of abuse. In 2010, there were more than 3.3 million reports of child abuse involving an estimated 5.9 million children (Child Help 2011). Three-fifths of child abuse reports are made by professionals, including teachers, law enforcement personnel, and social services staff. The rest are made by anonymous sources, other relatives, parents, friends, and neighbors.

Child abuse may come in several forms, the most common being neglect (78.3 percent), followed by physical abuse (10.8 percent), sexual abuse (7.6 percent), psychological maltreatment (7.6 percent), and medical neglect (2.4 percent) (Child Help 2011). Some children suffer from a combination of these forms of abuse. The majority (81.2 percent) of perpetrators are parents; 6.2 percent are other relatives.

Infants (children less than one year old) were the most victimized population with an incident rate of 20.6 per 1,000 infants. This age group is particularly vulnerable to neglect because they are entirely dependent on parents for care. Some parents do not purposely neglect their children; factors such as cultural values, standard of care in a community, and poverty can lead to hazardous level of neglect. If information or assistance from public or private services are available and a parent fails to use those services, child welfare services may intervene (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).



The Casey Anthony trial,  
in which Casey was



ultimately acquitted of murder charges against her daughter, Caylee, created public outrage and brought to light issues of child abuse and neglect across the United States. (Photo courtesy of Bruce Tuten/flickr)

Infants are also often victims of physical abuse, particularly in the form of violent shaking. This type of physical abuse is referred to as **shaken-baby syndrome**, which describes a group of medical symptoms such as brain swelling and retinal hemorrhage resulting from forcefully shaking or causing impact to an infant's head. A baby's cry is the number one trigger for shaking. Parents may find themselves unable to soothe a baby's concerns and may take their frustration out on the child by shaking him or her violently. Other stress factors such as a poor economy, unemployment, and general dissatisfaction with parental life may contribute this type of abuse. While there is no official central registry of shaken-baby syndrome statistics, it is estimated that each year 1,400 babies die or suffer serious injury from being shaken (Barr 2007).

**Note:**

**Corporal Punishment**

Physical abuse in children may come in the form of beating, kicking, throwing, choking, hitting with objects, burning, or other methods. Injury inflicted by such behavior is considered abuse even if the parent or caregiver did not intend to harm the child. Other types of physical contact that are characterized as discipline (spanking, for example) are not considered abuse as long as no injury results (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2008).

This issue is rather controversial among modern-day people in the United States. While some parents feel that physical discipline, or corporal punishment, is an effective way to respond to bad behavior, others feel that it is a form of abuse. According to a poll conducted by ABC News, 65 percent of respondents approve of spanking and 50 percent said that they sometimes spank their child.

Tendency toward physical punishment may be affected by culture and education. Those who live in the South are more likely than those who live in other regions to spank their child. Those who do not have a college education are also more likely to spank their child (Crandall 2011).

Currently, 23 states officially allow spanking in the school system; however, many parents may object and school officials must follow a set of clear guidelines when administering this type of punishment (Crandall 2011). Studies have shown that spanking is not an effective form of punishment and may lead to aggression by the victim, particularly in those who are spanked at a young age (Berlin 2009).

Child abuse occurs at all socioeconomic and education levels and crosses ethnic and cultural lines. Just as child abuse is often associated with stresses felt by parents, including financial stress, parents who demonstrate resilience to these stresses are less likely to abuse (Samuels 2011). Young parents are typically less capable of coping with stresses, particularly the stress of becoming a new parent. Teenage mothers are more likely to abuse their children than their older counterparts. As a parent's age increases, the risk of abuse decreases. Children born to mothers who are fifteen years old or younger are twice as likely to be abused or neglected by age five than are children born to mothers ages twenty to twenty-one (George and Lee 1997).

Drug and alcohol use is also a known contributor to child abuse. Children raised by substance abusers have a risk of physical abuse three times greater than other kids, and neglect is four times as prevalent in these families (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2011). Other risk factors include social isolation, depression, low parental education, and a history of being mistreated as a child. Approximately 30 percent of abused children will later abuse their own children (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2006).

The long-term effects of child abuse impact the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of a child. Injury, poor health, and mental instability occur at a high rate in this group, with 80 percent meeting the criteria of one or more psychiatric disorders, such as depression, anxiety, or suicidal behavior, by age twenty-one. Abused children may also suffer from cognitive and social difficulties. Behavioral consequences will affect most, but not all, of child abuse victims. Children of abuse are 25 percent more likely, as adolescents, to suffer from difficulties like poor academic performance and teen pregnancy, or to engage in behaviors like drug abuse and general delinquency. They are also more likely to participate in risky sexual acts that increase their chances of contracting a sexually transmitted disease (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2006). Other risky behaviors include drug and alcohol abuse. As these consequences can affect the health care, education, and criminal systems, the problems resulting from child abuse do not just belong to the child and family, but to society as a whole.

## **Summary**

Today's families face a variety of challenges, specifically to marital stability. While divorce rates have decreased in the last twenty-five years, many family members, especially children, still experience the negative effects of divorce. Children are also negatively impacted by violence and abuse within the home, with nearly 6 million children abused each year.

## **Section Quiz**

### **Exercise:**

**Problem:** Current divorce rates are:

- a. at an all-time high
- b. at an all-time low
- c. steadily increasing
- d. steadily declining

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**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Children of divorced parents are \_\_\_\_\_ to divorce in their own marriage than children of parents who stayed married.

- a. more likely
- b. less likely
- c. equally likely

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

In general, children in \_\_\_\_\_ households benefit from divorce.

- a. stepfamily
- b. multigenerational
- c. high-conflict
- d. low-conflict

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following is true of intimate partner violence (IPV)?

- a. IPV victims are more frequently men than women.
- b. One in ten women is a victim of IPV.
- c. Nearly half of instances of IPV involve drugs or alcohol.
- d. Rape is the most common form of IPV.

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**Solution:****Answer**

C

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Which type of child abuse is most prevalent in the United States?

- a. Physical abuse
- b. Neglect
- c. Shaken-baby syndrome
- d. Verbal mistreatment

---

**Solution:****Answer**

B

**Short Answer****Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Explain how financial status impacts marital stability. What other factors are associated with a couple's financial status?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Explain why more than half of IPV goes unreported? Why are those who are abused unlikely to report the abuse?

**Further Research**

To find more information on child abuse, visit the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services web site at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/child\\_welfare](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/child_welfare) to review documents provided by the Child Welfare Information Gateway.

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## Glossary

intimate partner violence (IPV)

violence that occurs between individuals who maintain a romantic or sexual relationship

shaken-baby syndrome

a group of medical symptoms such as brain swelling and retinal hemorrhage resulting from forcefully shaking or impacting an infant's head

## Introduction to Religion

class="introduction"

Religions come in many forms, such as this large megachurch.  
(Photo courtesy of ToBeDaniel/Wikimedia Commons)



Why do sociologists study religion? For centuries, humankind has sought to understand and explain the “meaning of life.” Many philosophers believe this contemplation and the desire to understand our place in the universe are what differentiate humankind from other species. Religion, in one form or another, has been found in all human societies since human societies first appeared. Archaeological digs have revealed ritual objects, ceremonial burial sites, and other religious artifacts. Social conflict and even wars often result from religious disputes. To understand a culture, sociologists must study its religion.

What is religion? Pioneer sociologist Émile Durkheim described it with the ethereal statement that it consists of “things that surpass the limits of our knowledge” (1915). He went on to elaborate: Religion is “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, called a church, all those who adhere to them” (1915). Some people associate religion with places of worship (a synagogue or church), others with a practice (confession or meditation), and still others with a concept that guides their daily lives (like dharma or sin). All these people can agree that **religion** is a system of beliefs, values, and practices concerning what a person holds sacred or considers to be spiritually significant.

Does religion bring fear, wonder, relief, explanation of the unknown or control over freedom and choice? How do our religious perspectives affect our behavior? These are questions sociologists ask and are reasons they study religion. What are peoples' conceptions of the profane and the sacred? How do religious ideas affect the real-world reactions and choices of people in a society?

Religion can also serve as a filter for examining other issues in society and other components of a culture. For example, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, it became important for teachers, church leaders, and the media to educate Americans about Islam to prevent stereotyping and to promote religious tolerance. Sociological tools and methods, such as surveys, polls, interviews, and analysis of historical data, can be applied to the study of religion in a culture to help us better understand the role religion plays in people’s lives and the way it influences society.

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## Glossary

religion

a system of beliefs, values, and practices concerning what a person holds to be sacred or spiritually significant

## The Sociological Approach to Religion

- Discuss the historical view of religion from a sociological perspective
- Understand how the major sociological paradigms view religion

From the Latin *religio* (respect for what is sacred) and *religare* (to bind, in the sense of an obligation), the term religion describes various systems of belief and practice that define what people consider to be sacred or spiritual (Fasching and deChant 2001; Durkheim 1915). Throughout history, and in societies across the world, leaders have used religious narratives, symbols, and traditions in an attempt to give more meaning to life and understand the universe. Some form of religion is found in every known culture, and it is usually practiced in a public way by a group. The practice of religion can include feasts and festivals, intercession with God or gods, marriage and funeral services, music and art, meditation or initiation, sacrifice or service, and other aspects of culture.

While some people think of religion as something individual because religious beliefs can be highly personal, religion is also a social institution. Social scientists recognize that religion exists as an organized and integrated set of beliefs, behaviors, and norms centered on basic social needs and values. Moreover, religion is a cultural universal found in all social groups. For instance, in every culture, funeral rites are practiced in some way, although these customs vary between cultures and within religious affiliations. Despite differences, there are common elements in a ceremony marking a person's death, such as announcement of the death, care of the deceased, disposition, and ceremony or ritual. These universals, and the differences in the way societies and individuals experience religion, provide rich material for sociological study.

In studying religion, sociologists distinguish between what they term the experience, beliefs, and rituals of a religion. **Religious experience** refers to the conviction or sensation that we are connected to "the divine." This type of communion might be experienced when people are pray or meditate. **Religious beliefs** are specific ideas members of a particular faith hold to be true, such as that Jesus Christ was the son of God, or that reincarnation exists. Another illustration of religious beliefs is the creation stories we find in different religions. **Religious rituals** are behaviors or practices that are

either required or expected of the members of a particular group, such as bar mitzvah or confession of sins (Barkan and Greenwood 2003).

## **The History of Religion as a Sociological Concept**

In the wake of nineteenth century European industrialization and secularization, three social theorists attempted to examine the relationship between religion and society: Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx. They are among the founding thinkers of modern sociology.

As stated earlier, French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) defined religion as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things” (1915). To him, sacred meant extraordinary—something that inspired wonder and that seemed connected to the concept of “the divine.” Durkheim argued that “religion happens” in society when there is a separation between the profane (ordinary life) and the sacred (1915). A rock, for example, isn’t sacred or profane as it exists. But if someone makes it into a headstone, or another person uses it for landscaping, it takes on different meanings—one sacred, one profane.

Durkheim is generally considered the first sociologist who analyzed religion in terms of its societal impact. Above all, he believed religion is about community: It binds people together (social cohesion), promotes behavior consistency (social control), and offers strength during life’s transitions and tragedies (meaning and purpose). By applying the methods of natural science to the study of society, Durkheim held that the source of religion and morality is the collective mind-set of society and that the cohesive bonds of social order result from common values in a society. He contended that these values need to be maintained to maintain social stability.

But what would happen if religion were to decline? This question led Durkheim to posit that religion is not just a social creation but something that represents the power of society: When people celebrate sacred things, they celebrate the power of their society. By this reasoning, even if traditional religion disappeared, society wouldn’t necessarily dissolve.

Whereas Durkheim saw religion as a source of social stability, German sociologist and political economist Max Weber (1864–1920) believed it was a precipitator of social change. He examined the effects of religion on economic activities and noticed that heavily Protestant societies—such as those in the Netherlands, England, Scotland, and Germany—were the most highly developed capitalist societies and that their most successful business leaders were Protestant. In his writing *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), he contends that the Protestant work ethic influenced the development of capitalism. Weber noted that certain kinds of Protestantism supported the pursuit of material gain by motivating believers to work hard, be successful, and not spend their profits on frivolous things. (The modern use of “work ethic” comes directly from Weber’s Protestant ethic, although it has now lost its religious connotations.)

**Note:**

**The Protestant Work Ethic in the Information Age**

Max Weber (1904) posited that, in Europe in his time, Protestants were more likely than Catholics to value capitalist ideology, and believed in hard work and savings. He showed that Protestant values directly influenced the rise of capitalism and helped create the modern world order. Weber thought the emphasis on community in Catholicism versus the emphasis on individual achievement in Protestantism made a difference. His century-old claim that the Protestant work ethic led to the development of capitalism has been one of the most important and controversial topics in the sociology of religion. In fact, scholars have found little merit to his contention when applied to modern society (Greeley 1989).

What does the concept of work ethic mean today? The work ethic in the information age has been affected by tremendous cultural and social change, just as workers in the mid- to late nineteenth century were influenced by the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Factory jobs tend to be simple, uninvolved, and require very little thinking or decision making on the part of the worker. Today, the work ethic of the modern workforce has been transformed, as more thinking and decision making is required. Employees also seek autonomy and fulfillment in their jobs, not just wages. Higher levels of education have become necessary, as well as



people management skills and access to the most recent information on any given topic. The information age has increased the rapid pace of production expected in many jobs.

On the other hand, the “McDonaldization” of the United States (Hightower 1975; Ritzer 1993), in which many service industries, such as the fast-food industry, have established routinized roles and tasks, has resulted in a “discouragement” of the work ethic. In jobs where roles and tasks are highly prescribed, workers have no opportunity to make decisions. They are considered replaceable commodities as opposed to valued employees. During times of recession, these service jobs may be the only employment possible for younger individuals or those with low-level skills. The pay, working conditions, and robotic nature of the tasks dehumanizes the workers and strips them of incentives for doing quality work.

Working hard also doesn’t seem to have any relationship with Catholic or Protestant religious beliefs anymore, or those of other religions; information age workers expect talent and hard work to be rewarded by material gain and career advancement.

German philosopher, journalist, and revolutionary socialist Karl Marx (1818–1883) also studied the social impact of religion. He believed religion reflects the social stratification of society and that it maintains inequality and perpetuates the status quo. For him, religion was just an extension of working-class (proletariat) economic suffering. He famously argued that religion “is the opium of the people” (1844).

For Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, who were reacting to the great social and economic upheaval of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in Europe, religion was an integral part of society. For Durkheim, religion was a force for cohesion that helped bind the members of society to the group, while Weber believed religion could be understood as something separate from society. Marx considered religion inseparable from the economy and the worker. Religion could not be understood apart from the capitalist society that perpetuated inequality. Despite their different views, these social theorists all believed in the centrality of religion to society.

# Theoretical Perspectives on Religion



Functionalists  
believe religion  
meets many  
important needs for  
people, including  
group cohesion and  
companionship.  
(Photo courtesy of  
James  
Emery/flickr)

Modern-day sociologists often apply one of three major theoretical perspectives. These views offer different lenses through which to study and understand society: functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and conflict theory. Let's explore how scholars applying these paradigms understand religion.

## **Functionalism**

Functionalists contend that religion serves several functions in society. Religion, in fact, depends on society for its existence, value, and significance, and vice versa. From this perspective, religion serves several purposes, like providing answers to spiritual mysteries, offering emotional comfort, and creating a place for social interaction and social control.

In providing answers, religion defines the spiritual world and spiritual forces, including divine beings. For example, it helps answer questions like, “How was the world created?” “Why do we suffer?” “Is there a plan for our lives?” and “Is there an afterlife?” As another function, religion provides emotional comfort in times of crisis. Religious rituals bring order, comfort, and organization through shared familiar symbols and patterns of behavior.

One of the most important functions of religion, from a functionalist perspective, is the opportunities it creates for social interaction and the formation of groups. It provides social support and social networking and offers a place to meet others who hold similar values and a place to seek help (spiritual and material) in times of need. Moreover, it can foster group cohesion and integration. Because religion can be central to many people’s concept of themselves, sometimes there is an “in-group” versus “out-group” feeling toward other religions in our society or within a particular practice. On an extreme level, the Inquisition, the Salem witch trials, and anti-Semitism are all examples of this dynamic. Finally, religion promotes social control: It reinforces social norms such as appropriate styles of dress, following the law, and regulating sexual behavior.

## **Conflict Theory**

Conflict theorists view religion as an institution that helps maintain patterns of social inequality. For example, the Vatican has a tremendous amount of wealth, while the average income of Catholic parishioners is small. According to this perspective, religion has been used to support the “divine right” of oppressive monarchs and to justify unequal social structures, like India’s caste system.

Conflict theorists are critical of the way many religions promote the idea that believers should be satisfied with existing circumstances because they are divinely ordained. This power dynamic has been used by Christian institutions for centuries to keep poor people poor and to teach them that they shouldn't be concerned with what they lack because their "true" reward (from a religious perspective) will come after death. Conflict theorists also point out that those in power in a religion are often able to dictate practices, rituals, and beliefs through their interpretation of religious texts or via proclaimed direct communication from the divine.



Many religions, including the Catholic faith, have long prohibited women from becoming spiritual leaders. Feminist theorists focus on gender inequality and promote leadership roles for women in religion. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

The feminist perspective is a conflict theory view that focuses specifically on gender inequality. In terms of religion, feminist theorists assert that, although women are typically the ones to socialize children into a religion,

they have traditionally held very few positions of power within religions. A few religions and religious denominations are more gender equal, but male dominance remains the norm of most.

**Note:**

**Rational Choice Theory: Can Economic Theory Be Applied to Religion?**

How do people decide which religion to follow, if any? How does one pick a church or decide which denomination “fits” best? Rational choice theory (RCT) is one way social scientists have attempted to explain these behaviors. The theory proposes that people are self-interested, though not necessarily selfish, and that people make rational choices—choices that can reasonably be expected to maximize positive outcomes while minimizing negative outcomes. Sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark (1988) first considered the use of RCT to explain some aspects of religious behavior, with the assumption that there is a basic human need for religion in terms of providing belief in a supernatural being, a sense of meaning in life, and belief in life after death. Religious explanations of these concepts are presumed to be more satisfactory than scientific explanations, which may help to account for the continuation of strong religious connectedness in countries such as the United States, despite predictions of some competing theories for a great decline in religious affiliation due to modernization and religious pluralism.

Another assumption of RCT is that religious organizations can be viewed in terms of “costs” and “rewards.” Costs are not only monetary requirements, but are also the time, effort, and commitment demands of any particular religious organization. Rewards are the intangible benefits in terms of belief and satisfactory explanations about life, death, and the supernatural, as well as social rewards from membership. RCT proposes that, in a pluralistic society with many religious options, religious organizations will compete for members, and people will choose between different churches or denominations in much the same way they select other consumer goods, balancing costs and rewards in a rational manner. In this framework, RCT also explains the development and decline of churches, denominations, sects, and even cults; this limited part of the very complex RCT theory is the only aspect well supported by research data.

Critics of RCT argue that it doesn't fit well with human spiritual needs, and many sociologists disagree that the costs and rewards of religion can even be meaningfully measured or that individuals use a rational balancing process regarding religious affiliation. The theory doesn't address many aspects of religion that individuals may consider essential (such as faith) and further fails to account for agnostics and atheists who don't seem to have a similar need for religious explanations. Critics also believe this theory overuses economic terminology and structure and point out that terms such as "rational" and "reward" are unacceptably defined by their use; they would argue that the theory is based on faulty logic and lacks external, empirical support. A scientific explanation for *why* something occurs can't reasonably be supported by the fact that it *does* occur. RCT is widely used in economics and to a lesser extent in criminal justice, but the application of RCT in explaining the religious beliefs and behaviors of people and societies is still being debated in sociology today.

## **Symbolic Interactionism**

Rising from the concept that our world is socially constructed, symbolic interactionism studies the symbols and interactions of everyday life. To interactionists, beliefs and experiences are not sacred unless individuals in a society regard them as sacred. The Star of David in Judaism, the cross in Christianity, and the crescent and star in Islam are examples of sacred symbols. Interactionists are interested in what these symbols communicate. Because interactionists study one-on-one, everyday interactions between individuals, a scholar using this approach might ask questions focused on this dynamic. The interaction between religious leaders and practitioners, the role of religion in the ordinary components of everyday life, and the ways people express religious values in social interactions—all might be topics of study to an interactionist.

## **Summary**

Religion describes the beliefs, values, and practices related to sacred or spiritual concerns. Social theorist Émile Durkheim defined religion as a

“unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things” (1915). Max Weber believed religion could be a force for social change. Karl Marx viewed religion as a tool used by capitalist societies to perpetuate inequality. Religion is a social institution, because it includes beliefs and practices that serve the needs of society. Religion is also an example of a cultural universal, because it is found in all societies in one form or another. Functionalism, conflict theory, and interactionism all provide valuable ways for sociologists to understand religion.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

In what ways does religion serve the role of a social institution?

- a. Religions have a complex and integrated set of norms.
- b. Religious practices and beliefs are related to societal values.
- c. Religions often meet several basic needs.
- d. All of the above

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

D

### Exercise:

**Problem:** A cultural universal is something that:

- a. addresses all aspects of a group’s behavior
- b. is found in all cultures
- c. is based on social norms
- d. may or may not be of value in meeting social needs

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the main theoretical perspectives would approach religion from the micro-level, studying how religion impacts an individual's sense of support and well-being?

- a. Functionalism
- b. Symbolic interactionism
- c. Conflict theory
- d. Feminism

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which perspective most emphasizes the ways in which religion helps keep the social system running smoothly?

- a. Functional perspective
- b. Symbolic interactionist perspective
- c. Conflict perspective
- d. Feminist perspective

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**



A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which socialist perspective most emphasizes the ways in which religion helps to maintain social inequalities within a society?

- a. Functional
- b. Symbolic interactionist
- c. Conflict theory
- d. Feminist perspective

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following do the functionalist and conflict perspectives share?

- a. Position that religion relates to social control, enforcing social norms
- b. Emphasis on religion as providing social support
- c. Belief that religion helps explain the mysteries of life
- d. None of the above

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

The Protestant work ethic was viewed in terms of its relationship to:

- a. evolution and natural selection
- b. capitalism
- c. determinism
- d. prejudice and discrimination

---

**Solution:****Answer**

B

**Short Answer****Exercise:****Problem:**

List some ways that you see religion having social control in the everyday world.

**Exercise:****Problem:**

What are some sacred items that you're familiar with? Are there some objects, such as cups, candles, or clothing, that would be considered profane in normal settings but are considered sacred in special circumstances or when used in specific ways?

**Exercise:**

## **Problem:**

Consider a religion that you are familiar with, and discuss some of its beliefs, behaviors, and norms. Discuss how these meet social needs. Then, research a religion that you don't know much about. Explain how its beliefs, behaviors, and norms are like/unlike the other religion.

## **Further Research**

For more discussion on the study of sociology and religion, check out the following blog: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/immanent\\_frame/](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/immanent_frame/). The Immanent Frame is a forum for the exchange of ideas about religion, secularism, and society by leading thinkers in the social sciences and humanities.

Read more about functionalist views on religion at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Grinnell\\_functionalism](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Grinnell_functionalism), symbolic interactionist view on religion at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/flat\\_Earth](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/flat_Earth), and women in the clergy at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women\\_clergy](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women_clergy).

Some would argue that the Protestant work ethic is still alive and well in the United States. Read British historian Niall Ferguson's view at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Protestant\\_work\\_ethic](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Protestant_work_ethic).

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## **Glossary**

religious experience

the conviction or sensation that one is connected to "the divine"

religious beliefs

specific ideas that members of a particular faith hold to be true

religious rituals

behaviors or practices that are either required for or expected of the members of a particular group

## World Religions

- Explain the differences between various types of religious organizations
- Understand classifications of religion, like animism, polytheism, monotheism, and atheism
- Describe several major world religions



The symbols of fourteen religions are depicted here. In no particular order, they represent Judaism, Wicca, Taoism, Christianity, Confucianism, Baha'i, Druidism, Islam, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Shinto, Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. Can you match the symbol to the religion? What might a symbolic interactionist make of these symbols?  
(Photo courtesy of

The major religions of the world (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Christianity, Taoism, and Judaism) differ in many respects, including how each religion is organized and the belief system each upholds. Other differences include the nature of belief in a higher power, the history of how the world and the religion began, and the use of sacred texts and objects.

## **Types of Religious Organizations**

Religions organize themselves—their institutions, practitioners, and structures—in a variety of fashions. For instance, when the Roman Catholic Church emerged, it borrowed many of its organizational principles from the ancient Roman military and turned senators into cardinals, for example. Sociologists use different terms, like ecclesia, denomination, and sect, to define these types of organizations. Scholars are also aware that these definitions are not static. Most religions transition through different organizational phases. For example, Christianity began as a cult, transformed into a sect, and today exists as an ecclesia.

**Cults**, like sects, are new religious groups. In the United States today this term often carries pejorative connotations. However, almost all religions began as cults and gradually progressed to levels of greater size and organization. The term cult is sometimes used interchangeably with the term new religious movement (NRM). In its pejorative use, these groups are often disparaged as being secretive, highly controlling of members' lives, and dominated by a single, charismatic leader.

Controversy exists over whether some groups are cults, perhaps due in part to media sensationalism over groups like polygamous Mormons or the Peoples Temple followers who died at Jonestown, Guyana. Some groups that are controversially labeled as cults today include the Church of Scientology and the Hare Krishna movement.

A **sect** is a small and relatively new group. Most of the well-known Christian denominations in the United States today began as sects. For example, the Methodists and Baptists protested against their parent Anglican Church in England, just as Henry VIII protested against the Catholic Church by forming the Anglican Church. From “protest” comes the term Protestant.

Occasionally, a sect is a breakaway group that may be in tension with larger society. They sometimes claim to be returning to “the fundamentals” or to contest the veracity of a particular doctrine. When membership in a sect increases over time, it may grow into a denomination. Often a sect begins as an offshoot of a denomination, when a group of members believes they should separate from the larger group.

Some sects do not grow into denominations. Sociologists call these **established sects**. Established sects, such as the Amish or Jehovah’s Witnesses fall halfway between sect and denomination on the ecclesia–cult continuum because they have a mixture of sect-like and denomination-like characteristics.

A **denomination** is a large, mainstream religious organization, but it does not claim to be official or state sponsored. It is one religion among many. For example, Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, Catholic, and Seventh-day Adventist are all Christian denominations.

The term **ecclesia**, originally referring to a political assembly of citizens in ancient Athens, Greece, now refers to a congregation. In sociology, the term is used to refer to a religious group that most all members of a society belong to. It is considered a nationally recognized, or official, religion that holds a religious monopoly and is closely allied with state and secular powers. The United States does not have an ecclesia by this standard; in fact, this is the type of religious organization that many of the first colonists came to America to escape.





How might you  
classify the  
Mennonites? As a  
cult, a sect, or a  
denomination?  
(Photo courtesy of  
Frenkieb/flickr)

One way to remember these religious organizational terms is to think of cults, sects, denominations, and ecclesia representing a continuum, with increasing influence on society, where cults are least influential and ecclesia are most influential.

## **Types of Religions**

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have strived to classify religions. One widely accepted categorization that helps people understand different belief systems considers what or who people worship (if anything). Using this method of classification, religions might fall into one of these basic categories, as shown in [\[link\]](#).

<b>Religious Classification</b>	<b>What/Who Is Divine</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Polytheism</b>	Multiple gods	Belief systems of the ancient Greeks and Romans
<b>Monotheism</b>	Single god	Judaism, Islam
<b>Atheism</b>	No deities	Atheism
<b>Animism</b>	Nonhuman beings (animals, plants, natural world)	Indigenous nature worship (Shinto)
<b>Totemism</b>	Human-natural being connection	Ojibwa (Native American) beliefs

One way scholars have categorized religions is by classifying what or who they hold to be divine.

Note that some religions may be practiced—or understood—in various categories. For instance, the Christian notion of the Holy Trinity (God, Jesus, Holy Spirit) defies the definition of **monotheism**, which is a religion based on belief in a single deity, to some scholars. Similarly, many Westerners view the multiple manifestations of Hinduism's godhead as **polytheistic**, which is a religion based on belief in multiple deities,, while Hindus might describe those manifestations are a monotheistic parallel to the Christian Trinity. Some Japanese practice Shinto, which follows **animism**, which is a religion that believes in the divinity of nonhuman beings, like animals, plants, and objects of the natural world, while people who practice **totemism** believe in a divine connection between humans and other natural beings.

It is also important to note that every society also has nonbelievers, such as **atheists**, who do not believe in a divine being or entity, and agnostics, who hold that ultimate reality (such as God) is unknowable. While typically not

an organized group, atheists and agnostics represent a significant portion of the population. It is important to recognize that being a nonbeliever in a divine entity does not mean the individual subscribes to no morality. Indeed, many Nobel Peace Prize winners and other great humanitarians over the centuries would have classified themselves as atheists or agnostics.

## **The World's Religions**

Religions have emerged and developed across the world. Some have been short-lived, while others have persisted and grown. In this section, we will explore seven of the world's major religions.

### **Hinduism**

The oldest religion in the world, Hinduism originated in the Indus River Valley about 4,500 years ago in what is now modern-day northwest India and Pakistan. It arose contemporaneously with ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures. With roughly one billion followers, Hinduism is the third-largest of the world's religions. Hindus believe in a divine power that can manifest as different entities. Three main incarnations—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—are sometimes compared to the manifestations of the divine in the Christian Trinity.

Multiple sacred texts, collectively called the Vedas, contain hymns and rituals from ancient India and are mostly written in Sanskrit. Hindus generally believe in a set of principles called dharma, which refer to one's duty in the world that corresponds with "right" actions. Hindus also believe in karma, or the notion that spiritual ramifications of one's actions are balanced cyclically in this life or a future life (reincarnation).



Hindu women sometimes apply decorations of henna dye to their hands for special occasions such as weddings and religious festivals. (Photo courtesy of Akash Mazumdar)



Buddhism promotes peace and tolerance. The 14th Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso) is one of the most revered

and influential  
Tibetan Buddhist  
leaders. (Photo  
courtesy of Nancy  
Pelosi/flickr)

## Buddhism

Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama around 500 B.C.E. Siddhartha was said to have given up a comfortable, upper-class life to follow one of poverty and spiritual devotion. At the age of thirty-five, he famously meditated under a sacred fig tree and vowed not to rise before he achieved enlightenment (*bodhi*). After this experience, he became known as Buddha, or “enlightened one.” Followers were drawn to Buddha’s teachings and the practice of meditation, and he later established a monastic order.



Meditation is an  
important practice  
in Buddhism. A  
Tibetan monk is

shown here  
engaged in solitary  
meditation. (Photo  
courtesy of Prince  
Roy/flickr)

Buddha's teachings encourage Buddhists to lead a moral life by accepting the four Noble Truths: 1) life is suffering, 2) suffering arises from attachment to desires, 3) suffering ceases when attachment to desires ceases, and 4) freedom from suffering is possible by following the "middle way." The concept of the "middle way" is central to Buddhist thinking, which encourages people to live in the present and to practice acceptance of others (Smith 1991). Buddhism also tends to deemphasize the role of a godhead, instead stressing the importance of personal responsibility (Craig 2002).

## **Confucianism**

Confucianism was the official religion of China from 200 B.C.E. until it was officially abolished when communist leadership discouraged religious practice in 1949. The religion was developed by Kung Fu-Tzu (Confucius), who lived in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. An extraordinary teacher, his lessons—which were about self-discipline, respect for authority and tradition, and *jen* (the kind treatment of every person)—were collected in a book called the *Analects*.

Some religious scholars consider Confucianism more of a social system than a religion because it focuses on sharing wisdom about moral practices but doesn't involve any type of specific worship; nor does it have formal objects. In fact, its teachings were developed in context of problems of social anarchy and a near-complete deterioration of social cohesion. Dissatisfied with the social solutions put forth, Kung Fu-Tzu developed his own model of religious morality to help guide society (Smith 1991).

## **Taoism**

In Taoism, the purpose of life is inner peace and harmony. Tao is usually translated as “way” or “path.” The founder of the religion is generally recognized to be a man named Laozi, who lived sometime in the sixth century B.C.E. in China. Taoist beliefs emphasize the virtues of compassion and moderation.

The central concept of *tao* can be understood to describe a spiritual reality, the order of the universe, or the way of modern life in harmony with the former two. The ying-yang symbol and the concept of polar forces are central Taoist ideas (Smith 1991). Some scholars have compared this Chinese tradition to its Confucian counterpart by saying that “whereas Confucianism is concerned with day-to-day rules of conduct, Taoism is concerned with a more spiritual level of being” (Feng and English 1972).

## **Judaism**

After their Exodus from Egypt in the thirteenth century B.C.E., Jews, a nomadic society, became monotheistic, worshipping only one God. The Jews’ covenant, or promise of a special relationship with Yahweh (God), is an important element of Judaism, and their sacred text is the Torah, which Christians also follow as the first five books of the Bible. Talmud refers to a collection of sacred Jewish oral interpretation of the Torah. Jews emphasize moral behavior and action in this world as opposed to beliefs or personal salvation in the next world.



The Islamic  
house of  
worship is  
called a  
mosque.  
(Photo  
courtesy of  
David  
Stanley/flickr  
)

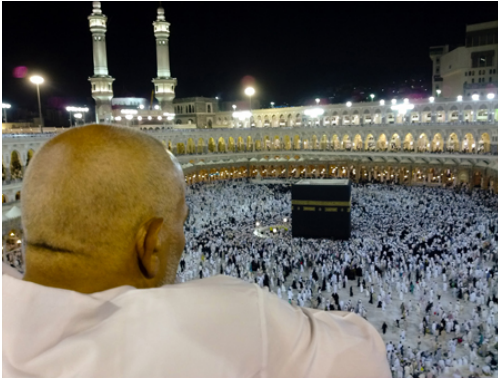
## **Islam**

Islam is monotheistic religion and it follows the teaching of the prophet Muhammad, born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 570 C.E. Muhammad is seen only as a prophet, not as a divine being, and he is believed to be the messenger of Allah (God), who is divine. The followers of Islam, whose U.S. population is projected to double in the next twenty years (Pew Research Forum 2011), are called Muslims.

Islam means “peace” and “submission.” The sacred text for Muslims is the Qur’an (or Koran). As with Christianity’s Old Testament, many of the Qur’an stories are shared with the Jewish faith. Divisions exist within Islam, but all Muslims are guided by five beliefs or practices, often called



“pillars”: 1) Allah is the only god, and Muhammad is his prophet, 2) daily prayer, 3) helping those in poverty, 4) fasting as a spiritual practice, and 5) pilgrimage to the holy center of Mecca.



cornerstones of Muslim practice is journeying to the religion's most sacred place, Mecca. (Photo courtesy of Raeky/flickr)

## Christianity

Today the largest religion in the world, Christianity began 2,000 years ago in Palestine, with Jesus of Nazareth, a charismatic leader who taught his followers about *caritas* (charity) or treating others as you would like to be treated yourself.

The sacred text for Christians is the Bible. While Jews, Christians, and Muslims share many of same historical religious stories, their beliefs verge. In their shared sacred stories, it is suggested that the son of God—a messiah—will return to save God's followers. While Christians believe that he already appeared in the person of Jesus Christ, Jews and Muslims disagree. While they recognize Christ as an important historical figure, their

traditions don't believe he's the son of God, and their faiths see the prophecy of the messiah's arrival as not yet fulfilled.

Different Christian groups have variations among their sacred texts. For instance, Mormons, an established Christian sect, also use the Book of Mormon, which they believe details other parts of Christian doctrine and Jesus' life that aren't included in the Bible. Similarly, the Catholic Bible includes the Apocrypha, a collection that, while part of the 1611 King James translation, is no longer included in Protestant versions of the Bible. Although monotheistic, Christians often describe their god through three manifestations that they call the Holy Trinity: the father (God), the son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a term Christians often use to describe religious experience, or how they feel the presence of the sacred in their lives. One foundation of Christian doctrine is the Ten Commandments, which decry acts considered sinful, including theft, murder, and adultery.

## **Summary**

Sociological terms for different kinds of religious organizations are, in order of decreasing influence in society, ecclesia, denomination, sect, and cult. Religions can be categorized according to what or whom its followers worship. Some of the major, and oldest, of the world's religions include Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

## **Section Quiz**

### **Exercise:**

#### **Problem:**

What are some denominations of the Christian Protestant church?

- a. Catholic and Jewish
- b. Jehovah's Witnesses and Presbyterians
- c. Scientology and Hare Krishna

d. Methodist and Seventh-day Adventist

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** A sect:

- a. has generally grown so large that it needs new buildings and multiple leaders
  - b. often believes it must split from the larger group to return to important fundamentals
  - c. is another term for a cult
  - d. All of the above
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

The main difference between an ecclesia and a denomination is:

- a. the number of followers or believers is much larger for denominations
  - b. the geographical location varies for ecclesia versus denominations
  - c. ecclesia are state-sponsored and considered an official religion
  - d. there are no important differences; the terms are interchangeable
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Some controversial groups that may be mislabeled as cults include:

- a. Scientology and the Hare Krishna
- b. the Peoples Temple and Heaven's Gate
- c. the Branch Davidians and the Manson Family
- d. Quakers and Pentecostals

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

In what part of the world have Confucianism and Taoism been primarily practiced?

- a. India
- b. Europe
- c. China
- d. The Middle East

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Many stories in the sacred text of Judaism are:

- a. referred to as the Apocrypha
  - b. oral traditions only because Judaism has no sacred text
  - c. shared by Christianity and Islam
  - d. no longer part of the Torah
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** What do Christianity and Islam have in common?

- a. Both believe in a single supreme god.
  - b. Both share many of the same stories in their central religious texts.
  - c. Both believe in an afterlife.
  - d. All of the above
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Consider the different types of religious organizations in the United States. What role did ecclesia play in the history of the United States? How have sects tended to change over time? What role do cults have today?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

What is your understanding of monotheism versus polytheism? How might your ideology be an obstacle to understanding the theism of another religion you're unfamiliar with?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

In U.S. society, do you believe there is social stratification that correlates with religious beliefs? What about within the practitioners of a given religion? Provide examples to illustrate your point.

**Further Research**

PBS's *Frontline* explores "the life of Jesus and the rise of Christianity" in this in-depth documentary. View the piece in its entirety here: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/PBS\\_Frontline](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/PBS_Frontline).

For more insight on Confucianism, read the *Analects* by Confucius, at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Confucius\\_Analects](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Confucius_Analects). For a primer on Judaism, read *Judaism 101* at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Jew\\_FAQ](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Jew_FAQ).

Sorting through the different Christian denominations can be a daunting task. To help clarify these groups, go to [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Christian\\_denominations](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Christian_denominations).

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## **Glossary**

animism

the religion that believes in the divinity of nonhuman beings, like animals, plants, and objects of the natural world

atheism

the belief in no deities

cults

religious groups that are small, secretive, and highly controlling of members and have a charismatic leader

denomination

a large, mainstream religion that is not sponsored by the state

ecclesia

a religion that is considered the state religion

established sects

sects that last but do not become denominations

monotheism

a religion based on belief in a single deity

polytheism

a religion based on belief in multiple deities

sect

a small, new offshoot of a denomination

totemism

the belief in a divine connection between humans and other natural beings



## Religion in the United States

- Give examples of religion as an agent of social change
- Describe current U.S. trends including megachurches and secularization

In examining the state of religion in the United States today, we see the complexity of religious life in our society, plus emerging trends like the rise of the megachurch, secularization, and the role of religion in social change.

## Religion and Social Change

Religion has historically been an impetus to social change. The translation of sacred texts into everyday, nonscholarly language empowered people to shape their religions. Disagreements between religious groups and instances of religious persecution have led to wars and genocides. The United States is no stranger to religion as an agent of social change. In fact, the United States' first European arrivals were acting largely on religious convictions when they were compelled to settle in the United States.

## Liberation Theology

**Liberation theology** began as a movement within the Roman Catholic Church in the 1950s and 1960s in Latin America, and it combines Christian principles with political activism. It uses the church to promote social change via the political arena, and it is most often seen in attempts to reduce or eliminate social injustice, discrimination, and poverty. A list of proponents of this kind of social justice (although some pre-date liberation theory) could include Francis of Assisi, Leo Tolstoy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Desmond Tutu.

Although begun as a moral reaction against the poverty caused by social injustice in that part of the world, today liberation theology is an international movement that encompasses many churches and denominations. Liberation theologians discuss theology from the point of view of the poor and the oppressed, and some interpret the scriptures as a call to action against poverty and injustice. In Europe and North America,

feminist theology has emerged from liberation theology as a movement to bring social justice to women.

**Note:**

**Religious Leaders and the Rainbow of Gay Pride**

What happens when a religious leader officiates a gay marriage against denomination policies? What about when that same minister defends the action in part by coming out and making her own lesbian relationship known to the church?

In the case of the Reverend Amy DeLong, it meant a church trial. Some leaders in her denomination assert that homosexuality is incompatible with their faith, while others feel this type of discrimination has no place in a modern church (Barrick 2011).

As the LGBT community increasingly advocates for, and earns, basic civil rights, how will religious communities respond? Many religious groups have traditionally discounted LGBT sexualities as “wrong.” However, these organizations have moved closer to respecting human rights by, for example, increasingly recognizing females as an equal gender. The Roman Catholic Church drew controversial attention to this issue in 2010 when the Vatican secretary of state suggested homosexuality was in part to blame for pedophilic sexual abuse scandals that have plagued the church (Beck 2010). Because numerous studies have shown there to be no relationship between homosexuality and pedophilia, nor a higher incidence of pedophilia among homosexuals than among heterosexuals (Beck 2010), the Vatican’s comments seem suspect. More recently Pope Francis has been pushing for a more open church, and some Catholic bishops have been advocating for a more “gay-friendly” church (McKenna, 2014). This has not come to pass, but some scholars believe these changes are a matter of time.

No matter the situation, most religions have a tenuous (at best) relationship with practitioners and leaders in the gay community. As one of the earliest Christian denominations to break barriers by ordaining women to serve as pastors, will Amy DeLong’s United Methodist denomination also be a leader in LGBT rights within Christian churchgoing society?

## Megachurches

A **megachurch** is a Christian church that has a very large congregation averaging more than 2,000 people who attend regular weekly services. As of 2009, the largest megachurch in the United States was in Houston Texas, boasting an average weekly attendance of more than 43,000 (Bogan 2009). Megachurches exist in other parts of the world, especially in South Korea, Brazil, and several African countries, but the rise of the megachurch in the United States is a fairly recent phenomenon that has developed primarily in California, Florida, Georgia, and Texas.

Since 1970 the number of megachurches in this country has grown from about fifty to more than 1,000, most of which are attached to the Southern Baptist denomination (Bogan 2009). Approximately six million people are members of these churches (Bird and Thumma 2011). The architecture of these church buildings often resembles a sport or concert arena. The church may include jumbotrons (large-screen televisual technology usually used in sports arenas to show close-up shots of an event). Worship services feature contemporary music with drums and electric guitars and use state-of-the-art sound equipment. The buildings sometimes include food courts, sports and recreation facilities, and bookstores. Services such as child care and mental health counseling are often offered.

Typically, a single, highly charismatic pastor leads the megachurch; at present, most are male. Some megachurches and their preachers have a huge television presence, and viewers all around the country watch and respond to their shows and fundraising.

Besides size, U.S. megachurches share other traits, including conservative theology, evangelism, use of technology and social networking (Facebook, Twitter, podcasts, blogs), hugely charismatic leaders, few financial struggles, multiple sites, and predominantly white membership. They list their main focuses as youth activities, community service, and study of the Scripture (Hartford Institute for Religion Research b).

Critics of megachurches believe they are too large to promote close relationships among fellow church members or the pastor, as could occur in smaller houses of worship. Supporters note that, in addition to the large

worship services, congregations generally meet in small groups, and some megachurches have informal events throughout the week to allow for community-building (Hartford Institute for Religion Research a).

## **Secularization**

Historical sociologists Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud anticipated secularization and claimed that the modernization of society would bring about a decrease in the influence of religion. Weber believed membership in distinguished clubs would outpace membership in Protestant sects as a way for people to gain authority or respect.

Conversely, some people suggest secularization is a root cause of many social problems, such as divorce, drug use, and educational downturn. One-time presidential contender Michele Bachmann even linked Hurricane Irene and the 2011 earthquake felt in Washington D.C. to politicians' failure to listen to God (Ward 2011).

While some scholars see the United States becoming increasingly secular, others observe a rise in fundamentalism. Compared to other democratic, industrialized countries, the United States is generally perceived to be a fairly religious nation. Whereas 65 percent of U.S. adults in a 2009 Gallup survey said religion was an important part of their daily lives, the numbers were lower in Spain (49 percent), Canada (42 percent), France (30 percent), the United Kingdom (27 percent), and Sweden (17 percent) (Crabtree and Pelham 2009). Secularization interests social observers because it entails a pattern of change in a fundamental social institution.

### **Note:**

**Thank God for that Touchdown: Separation of Church and State**

Imagine three public universities with football games scheduled on Saturday. At University A, a group of students in the stands who share the same faith decide to form a circle amid the spectators to pray for the team. For fifteen minutes, people in the circle share their prayers aloud among

their group. At University B, the team ahead at halftime decides to join together in prayer, giving thanks and seeking support from God. This lasts for the first ten minutes of halftime on the sidelines of the field while spectators watch. At University C, the game program includes, among its opening moments, two minutes set aside for the team captain to share a prayer of his choosing with the spectators.

In the tricky area of separation of church and state, which of these actions is allowed and which is forbidden? In our three fictional scenarios, the last example is against the law while the first two situations are perfectly acceptable.

In the United States, a nation founded on the principles of religious freedom (many settlers were escaping religious persecution in Europe), how stringently do we adhere to this ideal? How well do we respect people's right to practice any belief system of their choosing? The answer just might depend on what religion you practice.

In 2003, for example, a lawsuit escalated in Alabama regarding a monument to the Ten Commandments in a public building. In response, a poll was conducted by *USA Today*, CNN, and Gallup. Among the findings: 70 percent of people approved of a Christian Ten Commandments monument in public, while only 33 percent approved of a monument to the Islamic Qur'an in the same space. Similarly, survey respondents showed a 64 percent approval of social programs run by Christian organizations, but only 41 percent approved of the same programs run by Muslim groups (Newport 2003).

These statistics suggest that, for most people in the United States, freedom of religion is less important than the religion under discussion. And this is precisely the point made by those who argue for separation of church and state. According to their contention, any state-sanctioned recognition of religion suggests endorsement of one belief system at the expense of all others—contradictory to the idea of freedom of religion.

So what violates separation of church and state and what is acceptable? Myriad lawsuits continue to test the answer. In the case of the three fictional examples above, the issue of spontaneity is key, as is the existence (or lack thereof) of planning on the part of event organizers.

The next time you're at a state event—political, public school, community—and the topic of religion comes up, consider where it falls in this debate.

## Summary

Liberation theology combines Christian principles with political activism to address social injustice, discrimination, and poverty. Megachurches are those with a membership of more than 2,000 regular attendees, and they are a vibrant, growing and highly influential segment of U.S. religious life. Some sociologists believe levels of religiosity in the United States are declining (called secularization), while others observe a rise in fundamentalism.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Social scientists refer to the use of a church to combat social injustice in the political realm as:

- a. the protestant work ethic
- b. conflict management
- c. liberation theology
- d. justice work

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

C

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Megachurches tend to have:

- a. a variety of male and female clergy
- b. numerous buildings in which to meet
- c. high attendance for only a limited time
- d. large arenas where services are held

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

## Short Answer

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Do you believe the United States is becoming more secularized or more fundamentalist? Comparing your generation to that of your parents or grandparents, what differences do you see in the relationship between religion and society? What would popular media have you believe is the state of religion in the United States today?

## Further Research

What is a megachurch and how are they changing the face of religion? Read “Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: Their Characteristics and Cultural Context” at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/megachurch>.

Curious about the LGBT religious movement? Visit the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and Human Rights Campaign (HRC) web sites for current news about the growing inclusion of LGBT citizens into their respective religious communities, both in the pews and from the pulpit: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/GLAAD> and [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/human\\_rights\\_campaign](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/human_rights_campaign).

How do Christians feel about gay marriage? How many Mormons are there in the United States? Check out [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Pew\\_Forum](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Pew_Forum), the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, a research institute examining U.S. religious trends.

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## Glossary

liberation theology

the use of a church to promote social change via the political arena

megachurch

a Christian church that has a very large congregation averaging more than 2,000 people who attend regular weekly services

## Introduction to Education class="introduction"

Students who  
do graduate  
from college  
are likely to  
begin a career  
in debt.

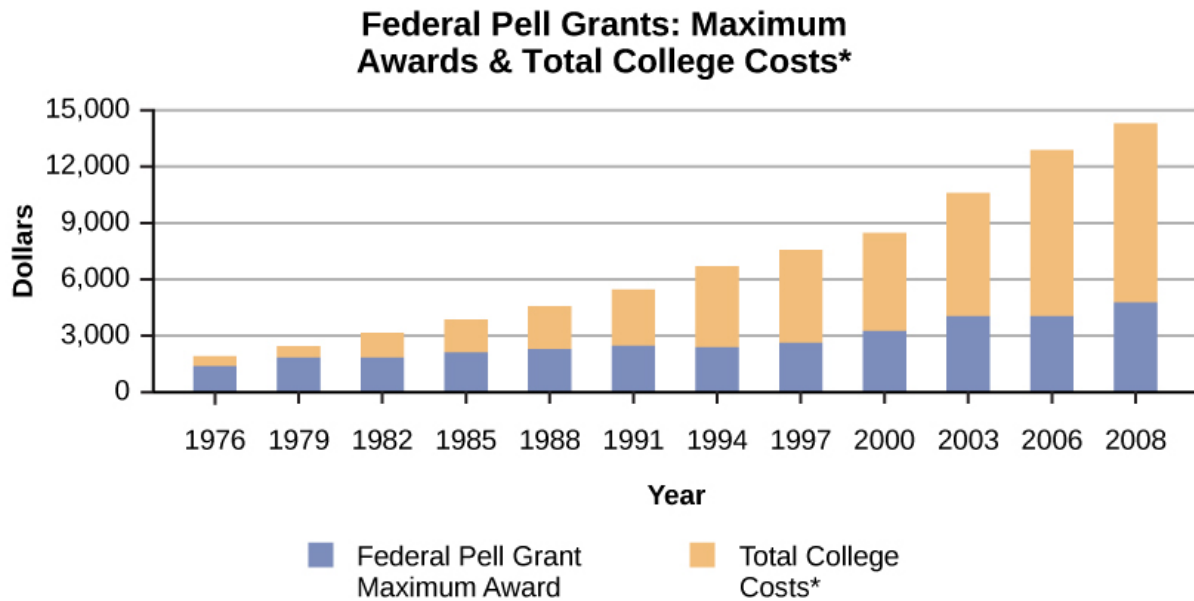
(Photo  
courtesy of  
Kevin  
Dooley/flickr  
)



"What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves" (Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*). David Simon, in his book *Social Problems and the Sociological Imagination: A Paradigm for Analysis* (1995), points to the notion that social problems are,

in essence, contradictions—that is, statements, ideas, or features of a situation that are opposed to one another. Consider then, that one of the greatest expectations in U.S. society is that to attain any form of success in life, a person needs an education. In fact, a college degree is rapidly becoming an expectation at nearly all levels of middle-class success, not merely an enhancement to our occupational choices. And, as you might expect, the number of people graduating from college in the United States continues to rise dramatically.

The contradiction, however, lies in the fact that the more necessary a college degree has become, the harder it has become to achieve it. The cost of getting a college degree has risen sharply since the mid-1980s, while government support in the form of Pell Grants has barely increased. The net result is that those who do graduate from college are likely to begin a career in debt. As of 2013, the average of amount of a typical student's loans amounted to around \$29,000. Added to that is that employment opportunities have not met expectations. The *Washington Post* (Brad Plumer May 20, 2013) notes that in 2010, only 27 percent of college graduates had a job related to their major. The business publication Bloomberg News states that among twenty-two-year-old degree holders who found jobs in the past three years, more than half were in roles not even requiring a college diploma (Janet Lorin and Jeanna Smialek, June 5, 2014).



\* Includes tuition, fees, room, and board at a public, four-year university or college. Selected fiscal years, 1976–2008.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Congressional Research Service, and The College Board.

As can be seen by the trend in the graph, while the Federal Pell Grant maximum has risen slightly between 1976 and 2008, it has not been able to keep pace with the total cost of college.

Is a college degree still worth it? All this is not to say that lifetime earnings among those with a college degree are not, on average, still much higher than for those without. But even with unemployment among degree-earners at a low of 3 percent, the increase in wages over the past decade has remained at a flat 1 percent. And the pay gap between those with a degree and those without has continued to increase because wages for the rest have fallen (David Leonhardt, New York Times, The Upshot, May 27, 2014).

But is college worth more than money?

Generally, the first two years of college are essentially a liberal arts experience. The student is exposed to a fairly broad range of topics, from mathematics and the physical sciences to history and literature, the social sciences, and music and art through introductory and survey-styled courses. It is in this period that the student's world view is, it is hoped, expanded.

Memorization of raw data still occurs, but if the system works, the student now looks at a larger world. Then, when he or she begins the process of specialization, it is with a much broader perspective than might be otherwise. This additional "cultural capital" can further enrich the life of the student, enhance his or her ability to work with experienced professionals, and build wisdom upon knowledge. Over two thousand years ago, Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." The real value of an education, then, is to enhance our skill at self-examination.

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## Education around the World

- Identify differences in educational resources around the world
- Describe the concept of universal access to education



These children are at a library in Singapore, where students are outperforming U.S. students on worldwide tests. (Photo courtesy of kodomut/flickr)

**Education** is a social institution through which a society's children are taught basic academic knowledge, learning skills, and cultural norms. Every nation in the world is equipped with some form of education system, though those systems vary greatly. The major factors that affect education systems are the resources and money that are utilized to support those systems in different nations. As you might expect, a country's wealth has much to do with the amount of money spent on education. Countries that do not have such basic amenities as running water are unable to support robust education systems or, in many cases, any formal schooling at all. The result of this worldwide educational inequality is a social concern for many countries, including the United States.

International differences in education systems are not solely a financial issue. The value placed on education, the amount of time devoted to it, and the distribution of education within a country also play a role in those

differences. For example, students in South Korea spend 220 days a year in school, compared to the 180 days a year of their United States counterparts (Pellissier 2010). As of 2006, the United States ranked fifth among twenty-seven countries for college participation, but ranked sixteenth in the number of students who receive college degrees (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2006). These statistics may be related to how much time is spent on education in the United States.

Then there is the issue of educational distribution within a nation. In December 2010, the results of a test called the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which is administered to fifteen-year-old students worldwide, were released. Those results showed that students in the United States had fallen from fifteenth to twenty-fifth in the rankings for science and math (National Public Radio 2010). Students at the top of the rankings hailed from Shanghai, Finland, Hong Kong, and Singapore.

Analysts determined that the nations and city-states at the top of the rankings had several things in common. For one, they had well-established standards for education with clear goals for all students. They also recruited teachers from the top 5 to 10 percent of university graduates each year, which is not the case for most countries (National Public Radio 2010).

Finally, there is the issue of social factors. One analyst from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the organization that created the test, attributed 20 percent of performance differences and the United States' low rankings to differences in social background. Researchers noted that educational resources, including money and quality teachers, are not distributed equitably in the United States. In the top-ranking countries, limited access to resources did not necessarily predict low performance. Analysts also noted what they described as "resilient students," or those students who achieve at a higher level than one might expect given their social background. In Shanghai and Singapore, the proportion of resilient students is about 70 percent. In the United States, it is below 30 percent. These insights suggest that the United States' educational system may be on a descending path that could detrimentally affect the country's economy and its social landscape (National Public Radio 2010).

**Note:****Education in Finland**

With public education in the United States under such intense criticism, why is it that Singapore, South Korea, and especially Finland (which is culturally most similar to us), have such excellent public education? Over the course of thirty years, the country has pulled itself from among the lowest rankings by the Organization of Economic Cooperation (OECD) to first in 2012, and remains, as of 2014, in the top five. Contrary to the rigid curriculum and long hours demanded of students in South Korea and Singapore, Finnish education often seems paradoxical to outside observers because it appears to break a lot of the rules we take for granted. It is common for children to enter school at seven years old, and children will have more recess and less hours in school than U.S. children—approximately 300 less hours. Their homework load is light when compared to all other industrialized nations (nearly 300 fewer hours per year in elementary school). There are no gifted programs, almost no private schools, and no high-stakes national standardized tests (Laukkanen 2008; LynNell Hancock 2011).

Prioritization is different than in the United States. There is an emphasis on allocating resources for those who need them most, high standards, support for special needs students, qualified teachers taken from the top 10 percent of the nation's graduates and who must earn a Master's degree, evaluation of education, balancing decentralization and centralization.

"We used to have a system which was really unequal," stated the Finnish Education Chief in an interview. "My parents never had a real possibility to study and have a higher education. We decided in the 1960s that we would provide a free quality education to all. Even universities are free of charge. Equal means that we support everyone and we're not going to waste anyone's skills." As for teachers, "We don't test our teachers or ask them to prove their knowledge. But it's true that we do invest in a lot of additional teacher training even after they become teachers" (Gross-Loh 2014).

Yet over the past decade Finland has consistently performed among the top nations on the PISA. Finland's school children didn't always excel. Finland built its excellent, efficient, and equitable educational system in a few decades from scratch, and the concept guiding almost every educational reform has been equity. The Finnish paradox is that by focusing on the



bigger picture for all, Finland has succeeded at fostering the individual potential of most every child.

"We created a school system based on equality to make sure we can develop everyone's potential. Now we can see how well it's been working. Last year the OECD tested adults from twenty-four countries measuring the skill levels of adults aged sixteen to sixty-five on a survey called the PIAAC (Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies), which tests skills in literacy, numeracy, and problem solving in technology-rich environments. Finland scored at or near the top on all measures."

## Formal and Informal Education

As already mentioned, education is not solely concerned with the basic academic concepts that a student learns in the classroom. Societies also educate their children, outside of the school system, in matters of everyday practical living. These two types of learning are referred to as formal education and informal education.

**Formal education** describes the learning of academic facts and concepts through a formal curriculum. Arising from the tutelage of ancient Greek thinkers, centuries of scholars have examined topics through formalized methods of learning. Education in earlier times was only available to the higher classes; they had the means for access to scholarly materials, plus the luxury of leisure time that could be used for learning. The Industrial Revolution and its accompanying social changes made education more accessible to the general population. Many families in the emerging middle class found new opportunities for schooling.

The modern U.S. educational system is the result of this progression. Today, basic education is considered a right and responsibility for all citizens. Expectations of this system focus on formal education, with curricula and testing designed to ensure that students learn the facts and concepts that society believes are basic knowledge.

In contrast, **informal education** describes learning about cultural values, norms, and expected behaviors by participating in a society. This type of

learning occurs both through the formal education system and at home. Our earliest learning experiences generally happen via parents, relatives, and others in our community. Through informal education, we learn how to dress for different occasions, how to perform regular life routines like shopping for and preparing food, and how to keep our bodies clean.



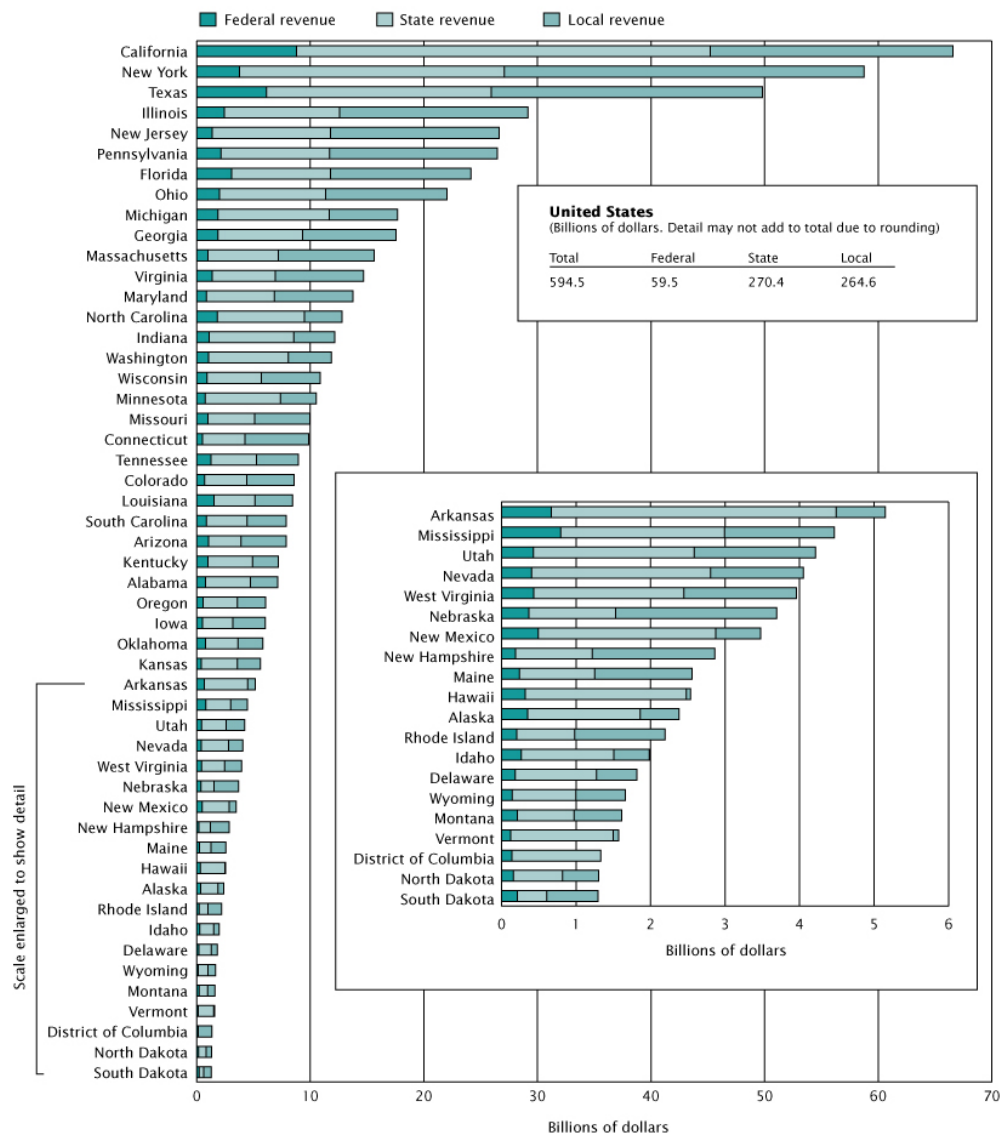
Parents teaching  
their children to  
cook provide an  
informal  
education.  
(Photo courtesy  
of  
eyeliam/flickr)

**Cultural transmission** refers to the way people come to learn the values, beliefs, and social norms of their culture. Both informal and formal education include cultural transmission. For example, a student will learn about cultural aspects of modern history in a U.S. History classroom. In that same classroom, the student might learn the cultural norm for asking a classmate out on a date through passing notes and whispered conversations.

## Access to Education

Another global concern in education is **universal access**. This term refers to people's equal ability to participate in an education system. On a world level, access might be more difficult for certain groups based on class or gender (as was the case in the United States earlier in the nation's history, a dynamic we still struggle to overcome). The modern idea of universal access arose in the United States as a concern for people with disabilities. In the United States, one way in which universal education is supported is through federal and state governments covering the cost of free public education. Of course, the way this plays out in terms of school budgets and taxes makes this an often-contested topic on the national, state, and community levels.

Figure 1.  
Public Elementary-Secondary School System Revenue by Source and State: Fiscal Year 2012



Source: 2012 Census of Governments: Finance—Survey of School System Finances. Data are not subject to sampling error, but for information on nonsampling error and definitions, see introductory text. Data users who create their own estimates from these tables should cite the U.S. Census Bureau as the source of the original data only.

How has your state's revenue affected your educational opportunities? (Graph courtesy of Census of Governments: Survey of School System Finances 2012)

A precedent for universal access to education in the United States was set with the 1972 U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia's decision in *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia*. This case was

brought on the behalf of seven school-age children with special needs who argued that the school board was denying their access to free public education. The school board maintained that the children's "exceptional" needs, which included mental retardation and mental illness, precluded their right to be educated for free in a public school setting. The board argued that the cost of educating these children would be too expensive and that the children would therefore have to remain at home without access to education.

This case was resolved in a hearing without any trial. The judge, Joseph Cornelius Waddy, upheld the students' right to education, finding that they were to be given either public education services or private education paid for by the Washington, D.C., board of education. He noted that

Constitutional rights must be afforded citizens despite the greater expense involved ... the District of Columbia's interest in educating the excluded children clearly must outweigh its interest in preserving its financial resources. ... The inadequacies of the District of Columbia Public School System whether occasioned by insufficient funding or administrative inefficiency, certainly cannot be permitted to bear more heavily on the "exceptional" or handicapped child than on the normal child (*Mills v. Board of Education* 1972).

Today, the optimal way to include differently abled students in standard classrooms is still being researched and debated. "Inclusion" is a method that involves complete immersion in a standard classroom, whereas "mainstreaming" balances time in a special-needs classroom with standard classroom participation. There continues to be social debate surrounding how to implement the ideal of universal access to education.

## Summary

Educational systems around the world have many differences, though the same factors—including resources and money—affect every educational

system. Educational distribution is a major issue in many nations, including in the United States, where the amount of money spent per student varies greatly by state. Education happens through both formal and informal systems; both foster cultural transmission. Universal access to education is a worldwide concern.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

What are the major factors that affect education systems throughout the world?

- a. Resources and money
- b. Student interest
- c. Teacher interest
- d. Transportation

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#### Solution:

#### Answer

A

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

What do nations that are top-ranked in science and math have in common?

- a. They are all in Asia.
- b. They recruit top teachers.
- c. They spend more money per student.
- d. They use cutting-edge technology in classrooms.

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**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Informal education \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. describes when students teach their peers
- b. refers to the learning of cultural norms
- c. only takes place at home
- d. relies on a planned instructional process

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Learning from classmates that most students buy lunch on Fridays is an example of \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. cultural transmission
- b. educational access
- c. formal education
- d. informal education

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

The 1972 case *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* set a precedent for \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. access to education
- b. average spending on students
- c. desegregation of schools
- d. teacher salary

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**Solution:****Answer**

A

**Short Answer****Exercise:****Problem:**

Has there ever been a time when your formal and informal educations in the same setting were at odds? How did you overcome that disconnect?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Do you believe free access to schools has achieved its intended goal? Explain.

**Further Research**

Though it's a struggle, education is continually being improved in the developing world. To learn how educational programs are being fostered worldwide, explore the Education section of the Center for Global



Development's website:

[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center\\_global\\_development](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center_global_development)

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## **Glossary**

cultural transmission

the way people come to learn the values, beliefs, and social norms of their culture

education

a social institution through which a society's children are taught basic academic knowledge, learning skills, and cultural norms

formal education

the learning of academic facts and concepts

informal education

education that involves learning about cultural values, norms, and expected behaviors through participation in a society

universal access

the equal ability of all people to participate in an education system

## Theoretical Perspectives on Education

- Define manifest and latent functions of education
- Explain and discuss how functionalism, conflict theory, feminism, and interactionism view issues of education

While it is clear that education plays an integral role in individuals' lives as well as society as a whole, sociologists view that role from many diverse points of view. Functionalists believe that education equips people to perform different functional roles in society. Conflict theorists view education as a means of widening the gap in social inequality. Feminist theorists point to evidence that sexism in education continues to prevent women from achieving a full measure of social equality. Symbolic interactionists study the dynamics of the classroom, the interactions between students and teachers, and how those affect everyday life. In this section, you will learn about each of these perspectives.

### **Functionalism**

Functionalists view education as one of the more important social institutions in a society. They contend that education contributes two kinds of functions: manifest (or primary) functions, which are the intended and visible functions of education; and latent (or secondary) functions, which are the hidden and unintended functions.

### **Manifest Functions**

There are several major manifest functions associated with education. The first is socialization. Beginning in preschool and kindergarten, students are taught to practice various societal roles. The French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), who established the academic discipline of sociology, characterized schools as “socialization agencies that teach children how to get along with others and prepare them for adult economic roles” (Durkheim 1898). Indeed, it seems that schools have taken on this responsibility in full.

This socialization also involves learning the rules and norms of the society as a whole. In the early days of compulsory education, students learned the dominant culture. Today, since the culture of the United States is increasingly diverse, students may learn a variety of cultural norms, not only that of the dominant culture.

School systems in the United States also transmit the core values of the nation through manifest functions like social control. One of the roles of schools is to teach students conformity to law and respect for authority. Obviously, such respect, given to teachers and administrators, will help a student navigate the school environment. This function also prepares students to enter the workplace and the world at large, where they will continue to be subject to people who have authority over them. Fulfillment of this function rests primarily with classroom teachers and instructors who are with students all day.



The teacher's authority in the classroom is a way in which education fulfills the manifest functions of social control.  
(Photo courtesy of Tulane Public Relations/flickr)

Education also provides one of the major methods used by people for upward social mobility. This function is referred to as **social placement**. College and graduate schools are viewed as vehicles for moving students closer to the careers that will give them the financial freedom and security they seek. As a result, college students are often more motivated to study areas that they believe will be advantageous on the social ladder. A student might value business courses over a class in Victorian poetry because she sees business class as a stronger vehicle for financial success.

## **Latent Functions**

Education also fulfills latent functions. As you well know, much goes on in a school that has little to do with formal education. For example, you might notice an attractive fellow student when he gives a particularly interesting answer in class—catching up with him and making a date speaks to the latent function of courtship fulfilled by exposure to a peer group in the educational setting.

The educational setting introduces students to social networks that might last for years and can help people find jobs after their schooling is complete. Of course, with social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn, these networks are easier than ever to maintain. Another latent function is the ability to work with others in small groups, a skill that is transferable to a workplace and that might not be learned in a homeschool setting.

The educational system, especially as experienced on university campuses, has traditionally provided a place for students to learn about various social issues. There is ample opportunity for social and political advocacy, as well as the ability to develop tolerance to the many views represented on campus. In 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement swept across college campuses all over the United States, leading to demonstrations in which diverse groups of students were unified with the purpose of changing the political climate of the country.

<b>Manifest Functions: Openly stated functions with intended goals</b>	<b>Latent Functions: Hidden, unstated functions with sometimes unintended consequences</b>
Socialization	Courtship
Transmission of culture	Social networks
Social control	Group work
Social placement	Creation of generation gap
Cultural innovation	Political and social integration

**Manifest and Latent Functions of Education** According to functionalist theory, education contributes both manifest and latent functions.

Functionalists recognize other ways that schools educate and enculturate students. One of the most important U.S. values students in the United States learn is that of individualism—the valuing of the individual over the value of groups or society as a whole. In countries such as Japan and China, where the good of the group is valued over the rights of the individual, students do not learn as they do in the United States that the highest rewards go to the “best” individual in academics as well as athletics. One of the roles of schools in the United States is fostering self-esteem; conversely, schools in Japan focus on fostering social esteem—the honoring of the group over the individual.

In the United States, schools also fill the role of preparing students for competition in life. Obviously, athletics foster a competitive nature, but even in the classroom students compete against one another academically. Schools also fill the role of teaching patriotism. Students recite the Pledge of Allegiance each morning and take history classes where they learn about national heroes and the nation’s past.



Starting each day with the Pledge of Allegiance is one way in which students are taught patriotism. (Photo courtesy of Jeff Turner/flickr)

Another role of schools, according to functionalist theory, is that of **sorting**, or classifying students based on academic merit or potential. The most capable students are identified early in schools through testing and classroom achievements. Such students are placed in accelerated programs in anticipation of successful college attendance.

Functionalists also contend that school, particularly in recent years, is taking over some of the functions that were traditionally undertaken by family. Society relies on schools to teach about human sexuality as well as basic skills such as budgeting and job applications—topics that at one time were addressed by the family.

## **Conflict Theory**

Conflict theorists do not believe that public schools reduce social inequality. Rather, they believe that the educational system reinforces and perpetuates social inequalities that arise from differences in class, gender, race, and ethnicity. Where functionalists see education as serving a beneficial role,

conflict theorists view it more negatively. To them, educational systems preserve the status quo and push people of lower status into obedience.



Conflict theorists see the education system as a means by which those in power stay in power. (Photo courtesy Thomas Ricker/flickr)

The fulfillment of one's education is closely linked to social class. Students of low socioeconomic status are generally not afforded the same opportunities as students of higher status, no matter how great their academic ability or desire to learn. Picture a student from a working-class home who wants to do well in school. On a Monday, he's assigned a paper that's due Friday. Monday evening, he has to babysit his younger sister while his divorced mother works. Tuesday and Wednesday, he works stocking shelves after school until 10:00 p.m. By Thursday, the only day he might have available to work on that assignment, he's so exhausted he can't bring himself to start the paper. His mother, though she'd like to help him, is so tired herself that she isn't able to give him the encouragement or support he needs. And since English is her second language, she has difficulty with some of his educational materials. They also lack a computer and printer at home, which most of his classmates have, so they have to rely on the public library or school system for access to technology. As this



story shows, many students from working-class families have to contend with helping out at home, contributing financially to the family, poor study environments and a lack of support from their families. This is a difficult match with education systems that adhere to a traditional curriculum that is more easily understood and completed by students of higher social classes.

Such a situation leads to social class reproduction, extensively studied by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He researched how **cultural capital**, or cultural knowledge that serves (metaphorically) as currency that helps us navigate a culture, alters the experiences and opportunities available to French students from different social classes. Members of the upper and middle classes have more cultural capital than do families of lower-class status. As a result, the educational system maintains a cycle in which the dominant culture's values are rewarded. Instruction and tests cater to the dominant culture and leave others struggling to identify with values and competencies outside their social class. For example, there has been a great deal of discussion over what standardized tests such as the SAT truly measure. Many argue that the tests group students by cultural ability rather than by natural intelligence.

The cycle of rewarding those who possess cultural capital is found in formal educational curricula as well as in the **hidden curriculum**, which refers to the type of nonacademic knowledge that students learn through informal learning and cultural transmission. This hidden curriculum reinforces the positions of those with higher cultural capital and serves to bestow status unequally.

Conflict theorists point to **tracking**, a formalized sorting system that places students on "tracks" (advanced versus low achievers) that perpetuate inequalities. While educators may believe that students do better in tracked classes because they are with students of similar ability and may have access to more individual attention from teachers, conflict theorists feel that tracking leads to self-fulfilling prophecies in which students live up (or down) to teacher and societal expectations (Education Week 2004).

To conflict theorists, schools play the role of training working-class students to accept and retain their position as lower members of society. They argue that this role is fulfilled through the disparity of resources

available to students in richer and poorer neighborhoods as well as through testing (Lauen and Tyson 2008).

IQ tests have been attacked for being biased—for testing cultural knowledge rather than actual intelligence. For example, a test item may ask students what instruments belong in an orchestra. To correctly answer this question requires certain cultural knowledge—knowledge most often held by more affluent people who typically have more exposure to orchestral music. Though experts in testing claim that bias has been eliminated from tests, conflict theorists maintain that this is impossible. These tests, to conflict theorists, are another way in which education does not provide opportunities, but instead maintains an established configuration of power.

## **Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory aims to understand the mechanisms and roots of gender inequality in education, as well as their societal repercussions. Like many other institutions of society, educational systems are characterized by unequal treatment and opportunity for women. Almost two-thirds of the world's 862 million illiterate people are women, and the illiteracy rate among women is expected to increase in many regions, especially in several African and Asian countries (UNESCO 2005; World Bank 2007).

Women in the United States have been relatively late, historically speaking, to be granted entry to the public university system. In fact, it wasn't until the establishment of Title IX of the Education Amendments in 1972 that discriminating on the basis of sex in U.S. education programs became illegal. In the United States, there is also a post-education gender disparity between what male and female college graduates earn. A study released in May 2011 showed that, among men and women who graduated from college between 2006 and 2010, men out-earned women by an average of more than \$5,000 each year. First-year job earnings for men averaged \$33,150; for women the average was \$28,000 (Godofsky, Zukin, and van Horn 2011). Similar trends are seen among salaries of professionals in virtually all industries.

When women face limited opportunities for education, their capacity to achieve equal rights, including financial independence, are limited. Feminist theory seeks to promote women's rights to equal education (and its resultant benefits) across the world.

**Note:**

**Grade Inflation: When Is an A Really a C?**

Consider a large-city newspaper publisher. Ten years ago, when culling résumés for an entry-level copywriter, they were well assured that if they selected a grad with a GPA of 3.7 or higher, they'd have someone with the writing skills to contribute to the workplace on day one. But over the last few years, they've noticed that A-level students don't have the competency evident in the past. More and more, they find themselves in the position of educating new hires in abilities that, in the past, had been mastered during their education.

This story illustrates a growing concern referred to as **grade inflation**—a term used to describe the observation that the correspondence between letter grades and the achievements they reflect has been changing (in a downward direction) over time. Put simply, what used to be considered C-level, or average, now often earns a student a B, or even an A.

Why is this happening? Research on this emerging issue is ongoing, so no one is quite sure yet. Some cite the alleged shift toward a culture that rewards effort instead of product, i.e., the amount of work a student puts in raises the grade, even if the resulting product is poor quality. Another oft-cited contributor is the pressure many of today's instructors feel to earn positive course evaluations from their students—records that can tie into teacher compensation, award of tenure, or the future career of a young grad teaching entry-level courses. The fact that these reviews are commonly posted online exacerbates this pressure.

Other studies don't agree that grade inflation exists at all. In any case, the issue is hotly debated, with many being called upon to conduct research to help us better understand and respond to this trend (National Public Radio 2004; Mansfield 2005).

## Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism sees education as one way that labeling theory is seen in action. A symbolic interactionist might say that this labeling has a direct correlation to those who are in power and those who are labeled. For example, low standardized test scores or poor performance in a particular class often lead to a student who is labeled as a low achiever. Such labels are difficult to “shake off,” which can create a self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton 1968).

In his book *High School Confidential*, Jeremy Iverson details his experience as a Stanford graduate posing as a student at a California high school. One of the problems he identifies in his research is that of teachers applying labels that students are never able to lose. One teacher told him, without knowing he was a bright graduate of a top university, that he would never amount to anything (Iverson 2006). Iverson obviously didn’t take this teacher’s false assessment to heart. But when an actual seventeen-year-old student hears this from a person with authority over her, it’s no wonder that the student might begin to “live down to” that label.

The labeling with which symbolic interactionists concern themselves extends to the very degrees that symbolize completion of education.

**Credentialism** embodies the emphasis on certificates or degrees to show that a person has a certain skill, has attained a certain level of education, or has met certain job qualifications. These certificates or degrees serve as a symbol of what a person has achieved, and allows the labeling of that individual.

Indeed, as these examples show, labeling theory can significantly impact a student’s schooling. This is easily seen in the educational setting, as teachers and more powerful social groups within the school dole out labels that are adopted by the entire school population.

## Summary

The major sociological theories offer insight into how we understand education. Functionalists view education as an important social institution

that contributes both manifest and latent functions. Functionalists see education as serving the needs of society by preparing students for later roles, or functions, in society. Conflict theorists see schools as a means for perpetuating class, racial-ethnic, and gender inequalities. In the same vein, feminist theory focuses specifically on the mechanisms and roots of gender inequality in education. The theory of symbolic interactionism focuses on education as a means for labeling individuals.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Which of the following is *not* a manifest function of education?

- a. Cultural innovation
- b. Courtship
- c. Social placement
- d. Socialization

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

B

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Because she plans on achieving success in marketing, Tammie is taking courses on managing social media. This is an example of \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. cultural innovation
- b. social control
- c. social placement
- d. socialization

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which theory of education focuses on the ways in which education maintains the status quo?

- a. Conflict theory
- b. Feminist theory
- c. Functionalist theory
- d. Symbolic interactionism

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which theory of education focuses on the labels acquired through the educational process?

- a. Conflict theory
- b. Feminist theory
- c. Functionalist theory
- d. Symbolic interactionism

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

What term describes the assignment of students to specific education programs and classes on the basis of test scores, previous grades, or perceived ability?

- a. Hidden curriculum
- b. Labeling
- c. Self-fulfilling prophecy
- d. Tracking

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Functionalist theory sees education as serving the needs of \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. families
- b. society
- c. the individual
- d. all of the above

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Rewarding students for meeting deadlines and respecting authority figures is an example of \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. a latent function
- b. a manifest function
- c. informal education
- d. transmission of moral education

---

**Solution:****Answer**

D

**Exercise:****Problem:**

What term describes the separation of students based on merit?

- a. Cultural transmission
- b. Social control
- c. Sorting
- d. Hidden curriculum

---

**Solution:****Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Conflict theorists see sorting as a way to \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. challenge gifted students
- b. perpetuate divisions of socioeconomic status



- c. help students who need additional support
  - d. teach respect for authority
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Conflict theorists see IQ tests as being biased. Why?

- a. They are scored in a way that is subject to human error.
  - b. They do not give children with learning disabilities a fair chance to demonstrate their true intelligence.
  - c. They don't involve enough test items to cover multiple intelligences.
  - d. They reward affluent students with questions that assume knowledge associated with upper-class culture.
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Thinking of your school, what are some ways that a conflict theorist would say that your school perpetuates class differences?

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which sociological theory best describes your view of education?  
Explain why.

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Based on what you know about symbolic interactionism and feminist theory, what do you think proponents of those theories see as the role of the school?

**Further Research**

Can tracking actually improve learning? This 2009 article from *Education Next* explores the debate with evidence from Kenya.

[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/education\\_next](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/education_next)

The National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) is committed to ending the bias and other flaws seen in standardized testing. Their mission is to ensure that students, teachers, and schools are evaluated fairly. You can learn more about their mission, as well as the latest in news on test bias and fairness, at their website: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/fair\\_test](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/fair_test)

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## **Glossary**

### **credentialism**

the emphasis on certificates or degrees to show that a person has a certain skill, has attained a certain level of education, or has met certain job qualifications

### **cultural capital**

cultural knowledge that serves (metaphorically) as currency to help one navigate a culture

### **grade inflation**

the idea that the achievement level associated with an A today is notably lower than the achievement level associated with A-level work a few decades ago

### **hidden curriculum**

the type of nonacademic knowledge that people learn through informal learning and cultural transmission

social placement

the use of education to improve one's social standing

sorting

classifying students based on academic merit or potential

tracking

a formalized sorting system that places students on "tracks" (advanced, low achievers) that perpetuate inequalities

## Issues in Education

- Identify and discuss historical and contemporary issues in education

As schools strive to fill a variety of roles in their students' lives, many issues and challenges arise. Students walk a minefield of bullying, violence in schools, the results of declining funding, plus other problems that affect their education. When Americans are asked about their opinion of public education on the Gallup poll each year, reviews are mixed at best (Saad 2008). Schools are no longer merely a place for learning and socializing. With the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling in 1954, schools became a repository of much political and legal action that is at the heart of several issues in education.

## Equal Education

Until the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, schools had operated under the precedent set by *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, which allowed racial segregation in schools and private businesses (the case dealt specifically with railroads) and introduced the much maligned phrase "separate but equal" into the U.S. lexicon. The 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision overruled this, declaring that state laws that had established separate schools for black and white students were, in fact, unequal and unconstitutional.

While the ruling paved the way toward civil rights, it was also met with contention in many communities. In Arkansas in 1957, the governor mobilized the state National Guard to prevent black students from entering Little Rock Central High School. President Eisenhower, in response, sent members of the 101st Airborne Division from Kentucky to uphold the students' right to enter the school. In 1963, almost ten years after the ruling, Governor George Wallace of Alabama used his own body to block two black students from entering the auditorium at the University of Alabama to enroll in the school. Wallace's desperate attempt to uphold his policy of "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever," stated during his 1963 inauguration (PBS 2000) became known as the "Stand in the Schoolhouse Door." He refused to grant entry to the students until a

general from the Alabama National Guard arrived on President Kennedy's order.



President Eisenhower sent members of the 101st Airborne Division from Kentucky to escort black students into Little Rock Central High School after the governor of Arkansas tried to deny them entry. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

Presently, students of all races and ethnicities are permitted into schools, but there remains a troubling gap in the equality of education they receive. The long-term socially embedded effects of racism—and other discrimination and disadvantage—have left a residual mark of inequality in the nation's education system. Students from wealthy families and those of lower socioeconomic status do not receive the same opportunities.

Today's public schools, at least in theory, are positioned to help remedy those gaps. Predicated on the notion of universal access, this system is mandated to accept and retain all students regardless of race, religion, social class, and the like. Moreover, public schools are held accountable to equitable per-student spending (Resnick 2004). Private schools, usually

only accessible to students from high-income families, and schools in more affluent areas generally enjoy access to greater resources and better opportunities. In fact, some of the key predictors for student performance include socioeconomic status and family background. Children from families of lower socioeconomic status often enter school with learning deficits they struggle to overcome throughout their educational tenure. These patterns, uncovered in the landmark Coleman Report of 1966, are still highly relevant today, as sociologists still generally agree that there is a great divide in the performance of white students from affluent backgrounds and their nonwhite, less affluent, counterparts (Coleman 1966).

## **Head Start**

The findings in the Coleman Report were so powerful that they brought about two major changes to education in the United States. The federal **Head Start program**, which is still active and successful today, was developed to give low-income students an opportunity to make up the preschool deficit discussed in Coleman's findings. The program provides academic-centered preschool to students of low socioeconomic status.

## **Busing**

The second major change brought about after the release of the Coleman Report was less successful than the Head Start program and has been the subject of a great deal of controversy. With the goal of further desegregating education, courts across the United States ordered some school districts to begin a program that became known as "busing." This program involved bringing students to schools outside their neighborhoods (and therefore schools they would not normally have the opportunity to attend) to bring racial diversity into balance. This practice was met with a great deal of public resistance from people on both sides dissatisfied with white students traveling to inner city schools and minority students being transported to schools in the suburbs.

## **No Child Left Behind**

In 2001, the Bush administration passed the **No Child Left Behind Act**, which requires states to test students in designated grades. The results of those tests determine eligibility to receive federal funding. Schools that do not meet the standards set by the Act run the risk of having their funding cut. Sociologists and teachers alike have contended that the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act is far more negative than positive, arguing that a “one size fits all” concept cannot apply to education.

## **Teaching to the Test**

The funding tie-in of the No Child Left Behind Act has led to the social phenomenon commonly called “teaching to the test,” which describes when a curriculum focuses on equipping students to succeed on standardized tests, to the detriment of broader educational goals and concepts of learning. At issue are two approaches to classroom education: the notion that teachers impart knowledge that students are obligated to absorb, versus the concept of student-centered learning that seeks to teach children not facts, but problem solving abilities and learning skills. Both types of learning have been valued in the U.S. school system. The former, to critics of “teaching to the test,” only equips students to regurgitate facts, while the latter, to proponents of the other camp, fosters lifelong learning and transferable work skills.

## **Bilingual Education**

New issues of inequality have entered the national conversation in recent years with the issue of bilingual education, which attempts to give equal opportunity to minority students through offering instruction in languages other than English. Though it is actually an old issue (bilingual education was federally mandated in 1968), it remains one of hot debate. Supporters of bilingual education argue that all students deserve equal opportunities in education—opportunities some students cannot access without instruction in their first language. On the other side, those who oppose bilingual education often point to the need for English fluency in everyday life and in the professional world.



## **Common Core**

"The Common Core is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA). These learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade." Included in the list of standards is that they be evidence-based, clear, understandable, consistent, aligned with college and career expectations, include the application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills, and are informed by other top-performing countries (The Common Core State Standards Initiative 2014).

The primary controversy over the Common Core State Standards, or simply the Common Core, from the standpoint of teachers, parents and students, and even administrators, is not so much the standards themselves, but the assessment process and the high stakes involved. Both the national teacher's unions in the United States initially agreed to them, at least in principle. But both have since become strong voices of criticism. Given a public education system that is primarily funded by local property taxes, rather than by state and federal funds distributed to all schools equally, we see a wide disparity of funding per student throughout the country, with the result that students in schools funded by well-to-do communities are clearly better off than those who are not, sometimes only a few miles away.

### **What gets measured?**

Much has been said about the quality, usefulness, and even accuracy of many of the standardized tests. Math questions have been found to be misleading and poorly phrased; for instance, "Tyler made 36 total snowfalls with is a multiple of how triangular snowflakes he made. How many triangular snowflakes could he have made?"

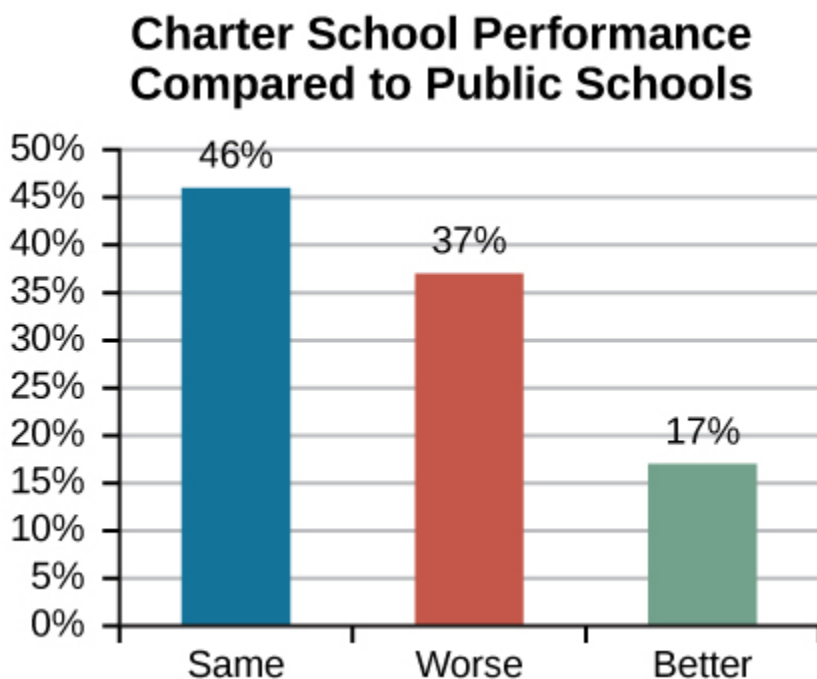
Some of the essays had questions that made little sense to the students. One notable test question in 2014 that dominated the Internet for a time was about "The Hare and the Pineapple." This was a parody on the well-known Aesop fable of the race between the hare and the tortoise that appeared on a standardized test for New York's eighth-grade exam, with the tortoise

changed into a talking pineapple. With the pineapple clearly unable to participate in a race and the hare winning, "the animals ate the pineapple." "Moral: Pineapples don't have sleeves."

At the end of the story, questions for the student included, "Which animal spoke the wisest words?" and "Why did the animals eat the talking fruit?"

## Charter Schools

Charter schools are self-governing public schools that have signed agreements with state governments to improve students when poor performance is revealed on tests required by the No Child Left Behind Act. While such schools receive public money, they are not subject to the same rules that apply to regular public schools. In return, they make agreements to achieve specific results. Charter schools, as part of the public education system, are free to attend, and are accessible via lottery when there are more students seeking enrollment than there are spots available at the school. Some charter schools specialize in certain fields, such as the arts or science, while others are more generalized.



The debate over the performance of charter schools vs. public schools is a charged one. Dozens of studies have been made on the topic, and some, as reflected in Stanford's CREDO study above, do not support the claim that charter schools always outperform public schools. (Source: Based on the CREDO study Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States)

**Note:**

**Money as Motivation in Charter Schools**

Public school teachers typically find stability, comprehensive benefits packages, and long-term job security. In 2011, one charter school in New York City set out to learn if teachers would give up those protections if it meant an opportunity to make much more money than the typical teacher's salary. The Equity Project is a privately run charter school that offered teachers positions paying \$125,000 per year (more than twice the average salary for teachers). The school's founder and principal, Zeke Vanderhoek, explained that this allows him to attract the best and brightest teachers to his school—to decide whom he hires and how much they are paid—and build a school where “every teacher is a great teacher” (CBS News 2011). He sees attracting top teachers as a direct road to student achievement. A nationwide talent search resulted in the submission of thousands of applications. The final round of interviews consisted of a day-long trial run. The school looks for teachers who can show evidence of student growth and achievement. They also must be highly engaging.

The majority of students at the school are African American and Hispanic, from poor families, and reading below grade level. The school faces the challenge faced by schools all over the United States: getting poor, disadvantaged students to perform at the same level as their more affluent counterparts. Vanderhoek believes his team of dream teachers can help students close their learning gaps by several grade levels within one year.

This is not an affluent school. It is publicly funded and classes are held in trailers. Most of the school's budget goes into the teachers' salaries. There are no reading or math aides; those roles are filled by the regular classroom teachers.

The experiment may be working. Students who were asked how they feel about their education at The Equity Project said that their teachers care if they succeed and give them the attention they need to achieve at high levels. They cite the feeling that their teachers believe in them as a major reason for liking school for the first time.

Of course, with the high salary comes high risk. Most public schools offer contracts to teachers. Those contracts guarantee job security. But The Equity Project is an at-will employer. Those who don't meet the standards set by the school will lose their jobs. Vanderhoek does not believe in teacher tenure, which he feels gives teachers "a job for life no matter how they perform" (CBS News 2011). With a teaching staff of roughly fifteen, he terminated two teachers after the first year. In comparison, in New York City as a whole, only seven teachers out of 55,000 with tenure have been terminated for poor performance.

One of those two teachers who was let go said she was relieved, citing eighty- to ninety-hour work weeks and a decline in the quality of her family life. Meanwhile, there is some question as to whether the model is working. On one hand, there are individual success stories, such as a student whose reading skills increased two grade levels in a single year. On the other, there is the fact that on the state math and reading exams taken by all fifth graders, the Equity Project students remained out-scored by other district schools (CBS News 2011). Do charter schools actually work? A Stanford CREDO study in 2009 found "there is a wide variance in the quality of the nation's several thousand charter schools with, in the aggregate, students in charter schools not faring as well as students in traditional public schools" (CREDO 2009).

## **Teacher Training**

Schools face an issue of teacher effectiveness, in that most high school teachers perceive students as being prepared for college, while most college

professors do not see those same students as prepared for the rigors of collegiate study. Some feel that this is due to teachers being unprepared to teach. Many teachers in the United States teach subject matter that is outside their own field of study. This is not the case in many European and Asian countries. Only eight percent of United States fourth-grade math teachers majored or minored in math, compared with 48 percent in Singapore. Further, students in disadvantaged American schools are 77 percent more likely to be educated by a teacher who didn't specialize in the subject matter than students who attend schools in affluent neighborhoods (Holt, McGrath, and Seastrom 2006).

## **Social Promotion**

Social promotion is another issue identified by sociologists. This is the concept of passing students to the next grade regardless of their meeting standards for that grade. Critics of this practice argue that students should never move to the next grade if they have not mastered the skills required to “graduate” from the previous grade. Proponents of the practice question what a school is to do with a student who is three to four years older than other students in his or her grade, saying this creates more issues than the practice of social promotion.

## **Affirmative Action**

Affirmative action has been a subject of debate, primarily as it relates to the admittance of college students. Opponents suggest that, under affirmative action, minority students are given greater weighted priorities for admittance. Supporters of affirmative action point to the way in which it grants opportunities to students who are traditionally done a disservice in the college admission process.

## **Rising Student Loan Debt**

In a growing concern, the amount of college loan debt that students are taking on is creating a new social challenge. As of 2010, the debts of students with student loans averaged \$25,250 upon graduation, leaving

students hard-pressed to repay their education while earning entry-level wages, even at the professional level (Lewin 2011). With the increase in unemployment since the 2008 recession, jobs are scarce and make this burden more pronounced. As recent grads find themselves unable to meet their financial obligations, all of society is affected.

## **Home Schooling**

Homeschooling refers to children being educated in their own homes, typically by a parent, instead of in a traditional public or private school system. Proponents of this type of education argue that it provides an outstanding opportunity for student-centered learning while circumventing problems that plague today's education system. Opponents counter that homeschooled children miss out on the opportunity for social development that occurs in standard classroom environments and school settings.

Proponents say that parents know their own children better than anyone else and are thus best equipped to teach them. Those on the other side of the debate assert that childhood education is a complex task and requires the degree teachers spend four years earning. After all, they argue, a parent may know her child's body better than anyone, yet she seeks out a doctor for her child's medical treatment. Just as a doctor is a trained medical expert, teachers are trained education experts.

The National Center for Education Statistics shows that the quality of the national education system isn't the only major concern of homeschoolers. While nearly half cite their reason for homeschooling as the belief that they can give their child a better education than the school system can, just under 40 percent choose homeschooling for "religious reasons" (NCES 2008).

To date, researchers have not found consensus in studies evaluating the success, or lack thereof, of homeschooling.

## **Summary**

As schools continue to fill many roles in the lives of students, challenges arise. Historical issues include the racial desegregation of schools, marked

by the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling. In today's diverse educational landscape, socioeconomic status and diversity remain at the heart of issues in education, with programs such as the Head Start program attempting to give students equal footing. Other educational issues that impact society include charter schools, teaching to the test, student loan debt, and homeschooling.

One hot topic is the Common Core State Standards, or the Common Core. The primary controversy over the Common Core, from the standpoint of teachers, parents and students, and even administrators, is not so much the standards themselves, but the assessment process and the high stakes involved

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

**Problem:** *Plessy v. Ferguson* set the precedent that \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. racial segregation in schools was allowed
- b. separate schools for black and white students were unconstitutional
- c. students do not have a right to free speech in public schools
- d. students have a right to free speech in public schools

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

A

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Public schools must guarantee that \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. all students graduate from high school
- b. all students receive an equal education

- c. per-student spending is equitable
  - d. the amount spent on each student is equal to that spent regionally
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Key predictors for student success include \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. how many school-age siblings the student has
  - b. socioeconomic status and family background
  - c. the age of the student when she or he enters kindergarten
  - d. how many students attend the school
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Allowing a student to move to the next grade regardless of whether or not they have met the requirements for that grade is called \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. affirmative action
  - b. social control
  - c. social promotion
  - d. socialization
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**



## Short Answer

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Is busing a reasonable method of serving students from diverse backgrounds? If not, suggest and support an alternative.

## Further Research

Whether or not students in public schools are entitled to free speech is a subject of much debate. In the public school system, there can be a clash between the need for a safe learning environment and the guarantee to free speech granted to U.S. citizens. You can learn more about this complicated issue at the Center for Public Education.

[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center\\_public\\_education](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center_public_education)

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## Glossary

Head Start program

a federal program that provides academically focused preschool to students of low socioeconomic status

No Child Left Behind Act

an act that requires states to test students in prescribed grades, with the results of those tests determining eligibility to receive federal funding

## Introduction to Social Movements and Social Change

class="introduction"

In many ways,  
this mask,  
which perhaps  
became  
infamous due to  
its use by the  
"hacktivist"  
group  
Anonymous,  
has come to  
stand for  
revolution and  
social change  
around the  
world. (Photo  
courtesy of  
Coco  
Curranski/flickr  
)



Perhaps the social movement that ran the most contrary to theory in recent history is Occupy Wall Street (OWS). Although it contains many of the classic developmental elements of a social movement we will describe in this chapter, it is set apart by its lack of a single message, its leaderless organization, and its target—financial institutions instead of the government. OWS baffled much of the public, and certainly the mainstream media, leading many to ask, "Who are they, and what do they want?"

On July 13, 2011, the organization Adbusters posted on its blog, "Are you ready for a Tahrir moment? On September 17th, flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street" (Castells 2012).

The "Tahrir moment" was a reference to the 2010 political uprising that began in Tunisia and spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa, including Egypt's Tahrir Square in Cairo. Although OWS was a reaction to the continuing financial chaos that resulted from the 2008 market meltdown and not a political movement, the Arab Spring was its catalyst.

Manuel Castells (2012) notes that the years leading up to the Occupy movement had witnessed a dizzying increase in the disparity of wealth in the United States, stemming back to the 1980s. The top 1 percent in the nation had secured 58 percent of the economic growth in the period for themselves, while real hourly wages for the average worker had increased by only 2 percent. The wealth of the top 5 percent had increased by 42 percent. The average pay of a CEO was now 350 times that of the average worker, compared to less than 50 times in 1983 (AFL-CIO 2014). The country's leading financial institutions, to many clearly to blame for the crisis and dubbed "too big to fail," were in trouble after many poorly qualified borrowers defaulted on their mortgage loans when the loans' interest rates rose. The banks were eventually "bailed" out by the government with \$700 billion of taxpayer money. According to many reports, that same year top executives and traders received large bonuses.

On September 17, 2011, an anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution, the occupation began. One thousand outraged protestors descended upon Wall Street, and up to 20,000 people moved into Zuccotti Park, only two blocks away, where they began building a village of tents and organizing a system of communication. The protest soon began spreading throughout the nation, and its members started calling themselves "the 99 percent." More than a thousand cities and towns had Occupy demonstrations.

In answer to the question "Who are they?" Castells notes ". . . by and large the movement was made up of a large majority of democratic voters, as well as of politically independent minded people who were in search of new forms of changing the world . . ." (Castells 2012). What do they want? Castells has dubbed OWS "A non-demand movement: The process is the message." Using Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and live-stream video, the protesters conveyed a multifold message with a long list of reforms and social change, including the need to address the rising disparity of wealth, the influence of money on election outcomes, the notion of "corporate personhood," a corporatized political system (to be replaced by "direct democracy"), political favoring of the rich, and rising student debt. Regardless, some in the media appeared confused about the protestors' intentions, and articles carried titles like, "The Wall Street Protesters: What

the Hell Do They Want?" (Gell 2011) from *The New York Observer*, and person-in-the-street quotations like, "I think they're idiots. They have no agenda . . . " from the *Los Angeles Times* (Le Tellier 2012).

The late James C. Davies suggested in his 1962 paper, "Toward a Theory of Revolution" (from the *American Sociological Review*, Vol, 27 Issue 1) that revolution depends upon the mood of the people, and that it is extremely unlikely those in absolute poverty will be able to overturn a government, simply because the government has infinitely more power. Instead, a revolution is more possible when expected need satisfaction and actual need satisfaction are out of sync. As actual need satisfaction trends downward and away from what a formerly prosperous people have come to expect—tracing a curve that looks somewhat like an upside-down J and is called the Davies-J curve—the gap between expectations and reality widens. Eventually an intolerable point is reached, and revolution occurs. Thus, change comes not from the very bottom of the social hierarchy, but from somewhere in the middle. Indeed, the Arab Spring was driven by mostly young people whose education had offered promise and expectations that were thwarted by corrupt autocratic governments. OWS too came not from the bottom but from people in the middle, who exploited the power of social media to enhance communication.

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## Collective Behavior

- Describe different forms of collective behavior
- Differentiate between types of crowds
- Discuss emergent norm, value-added, and assembling perspective analyses of collective behavior

### **Note:**

#### Flash Mobs



Is this a good time had by all? Some flash mobs may function as political protests, while others are for fun. This flash mob pillow fight's purpose was to entertain. (Photo courtesy of [Mattwi1S0n:/flickr](#))

In March 2014, a group of musicians got together in a fish market in Odessa for a spontaneous performance of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" from his Ninth Symphony. While tensions were building over Ukraine's efforts to join the European Union, and even as Russian troops had taken control of the Ukrainian airbase in Belbek, the Odessa Philharmonic Orchestra and

Opera Chorus tried to lighten the troubled times for shoppers with music and song.

Spontaneous gatherings like this are called **flash mobs**. They often are captured on video and shared on the Internet; frequently they go viral. Humans seek connections and shared experiences. Perhaps experiencing a flash mob event enhances this bond. It certainly interrupts our otherwise mundane routine with a reminder that we are social animals.

## Forms of Collective Behavior

Flash mobs are examples of **collective behavior**, noninstitutionalized activity in which several or many people voluntarily engage. Other examples are a group of commuters traveling home from work and a population of teens adopting a favorite singer's hairstyle. In short, collective behavior is any group behavior that is not mandated or regulated by an institution. There are three primary forms of collective behavior: the crowd, the mass, and the public.

It takes a fairly large number of people in close proximity to form a **crowd** (Lofland 1993). Examples include a group of people attending an Ani DiFranco concert, tailgating at a Patriots game, or attending a worship service. Turner and Killian (1993) identified four types of crowds. **Casual crowds** consist of people who are in the same place at the same time but who aren't really interacting, such as people standing in line at the post office. **Conventional crowds** are those who come together for a scheduled event that occurs regularly, like a religious service. **Expressive crowds** are people who join together to express emotion, often at funerals, weddings, or the like. The final type, **acting crowds**, focuses on a specific goal or action, such as a protest movement or riot.

In addition to the different types of crowds, collective groups can also be identified in two other ways. A **mass** is a relatively large number of people with a common interest, though they may not be in close proximity (Lofland 1993), such as players of the popular Facebook game Farmville. A **public**, on the other hand, is an unorganized, relatively diffused group of people who share ideas, such as the Libertarian political party. While these

two types of crowds are similar, they are not the same. To distinguish between them, remember that members of a mass share interests, whereas members of a public share ideas.

## **Theoretical Perspectives on Collective Behavior**

Early collective behavior theories (LeBon 1895; Blumer 1969) focused on the irrationality of crowds. Eventually, those theorists who viewed crowds as uncontrolled groups of irrational people were supplanted by theorists who viewed the behavior some crowds engaged in as the rational behavior of logical beings.

### **Emergent-Norm Perspective**



According to the emergent-norm perspective, Hurricane Katrina victims sought needed supplies for survival, but to outsiders their behavior would normally be seen as looting. (Photo courtesy of

Sociologists Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian (1993) built on earlier sociological ideas and developed what is known as emergent norm theory. They believe that the norms experienced by people in a crowd may be disparate and fluctuating. They emphasize the importance of these norms in shaping crowd behavior, especially those norms that shift quickly in response to changing external factors. **Emergent norm theory** asserts that, in this circumstance, people perceive and respond to the crowd situation with their particular (individual) set of norms, which may change as the crowd experience evolves. This focus on the individual component of interaction reflects a symbolic interactionist perspective.

For Turner and Killian, the process begins when individuals suddenly find themselves in a new situation, or when an existing situation suddenly becomes strange or unfamiliar. For example, think about human behavior during Hurricane Katrina. New Orleans was decimated and people were trapped without supplies or a way to evacuate. In these extraordinary circumstances, what outsiders saw as “looting” was defined by those involved as seeking needed supplies for survival. Normally, individuals would not wade into a corner gas station and take canned goods without paying, but given that they were suddenly in a greatly changed situation, they established a norm that they felt was reasonable.

Once individuals find themselves in a situation ungoverned by previously established norms, they interact in small groups to develop new guidelines on how to behave. According to the emergent-norm perspective, crowds are not viewed as irrational, impulsive, uncontrolled groups. Instead, norms develop and are accepted as they fit the situation. While this theory offers insight into why norms develop, it leaves undefined the nature of norms, how they come to be accepted by the crowd, and how they spread through the crowd.

## Value-Added Theory

Neil Smelser's (1962) meticulous categorization of crowd behavior, called **value-added theory**, is a perspective within the functionalist tradition based on the idea that several conditions must be in place for collective behavior to occur. Each condition adds to the likelihood that collective behavior will occur. The first condition is *structural conduciveness*, which occurs when people are aware of the problem and have the opportunity to gather, ideally in an open area. *Structural strain*, the second condition, refers to people's expectations about the situation at hand being unmet, causing tension and strain. The next condition is the *growth and spread of a generalized belief*, wherein a problem is clearly identified and attributed to a person or group.

Fourth, *precipitating factors* spur collective behavior; this is the emergence of a dramatic event. The fifth condition is *mobilization for action*, when leaders emerge to direct a crowd to action. The final condition relates to action by the agents. Called *social control*, it is the only way to end the collective behavior episode (Smelser 1962).

A real-life example of these conditions occurred after the fatal police shooting of teenager Michael Brown, an unarmed eighteen-year-old African American, in Ferguson, MO on August 9, 2014. The shooting drew national attention almost immediately. A large group of mostly black, local residents assembled in protest—a classic example of structural conduciveness. When the community perceived that the police were not acting in the people's interest and were withholding the name of the officer, structural strain became evident. A growing generalized belief evolved as the crowd of protesters were met with heavily armed police in military-style protective uniforms accompanied by an armored vehicle. The precipitating factor of the arrival of the police spurred greater collective behavior as the residents mobilized by assembling a parade down the street. Ultimately they were met with tear gas, pepper spray, and rubber bullets used by the police acting as agents of social control. The element of social control escalated over the following days until August 18, when the governor called in the National Guard.



Agents of social control bring collective behavior to an end. (Photo courtesy of hozinja/flickr)

## Assembling Perspective

Interactionist sociologist Clark McPhail (1991) developed **assembling perspective**, another system for understanding collective behavior that credited individuals in crowds as rational beings. Unlike previous theories, this theory refocuses attention from collective behavior to collective action. Remember that collective behavior is a noninstitutionalized gathering, whereas collective action is based on a shared interest. McPhail's theory focused primarily on the processes associated with crowd behavior, plus the lifecycle of gatherings. He identified several instances of convergent or collective behavior, as shown on the chart below.

<b>Type of crowd</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
Convergence clusters	Family and friends who travel together	Carpooling parents take several children to the movies
Convergent orientation	Group all facing the same direction	A semi-circle around a stage
Collective vocalization	Sounds or noises made collectively	Screams on a roller coaster
Collective verbalization	Collective and simultaneous participation in a speech or song	Pledge of Allegiance in the school classroom
Collective gesticulation	Body parts forming symbols	The YMCA dance
Collective manipulation	Objects collectively moved around	Holding signs at a protest rally
Collective locomotion	The direction and rate of movement to the event	Children running to an ice cream truck

Clark McPhail identified various circumstances of convergent and collective behavior (McPhail 1991).

As useful as this is for understanding the components of how crowds come together, many sociologists criticize its lack of attention on the large cultural context of the described behaviors, instead focusing on individual actions.

## Summary

Collective behavior is noninstitutionalized activity in which several people voluntarily engage. There are three different forms of collective behavior: crowd, mass, and public. There are three main theories on collective behavior. The first, the emergent-norm perspective, emphasizes the importance of social norms in crowd behavior. The next, the value-added theory, is a functionalist perspective that states that several preconditions must be in place for collective behavior to occur. Finally the assembling perspective focuses on collective action rather than collective behavior, addressing the processes associated with crowd behavior and the lifecycle and various categories of gatherings.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

Which of the following organizations is *not* an example of a social movement?

- a. National Football League
- b. Tea Party
- c. Greenpeace
- d. NAACP

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

A

### Exercise:

**Problem:** Sociologists using conflict perspective might study what?

- a. How social movements develop
- b. What social purposes a movement serves
- c. What motivates inequitably treated people to join a movement



d. What individuals hope to gain from taking part in a social movement

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Which of the following is an example of collective behavior?

- a. A soldier questioning orders
  - b. A group of people interested in hearing an author speak
  - c. A class going on a field trip
  - d. Going shopping with a friend
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

B

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** The protesters at the Egypt uprising rally were:

- a. a casual crowd
  - b. a conventional crowd
  - c. a mass
  - d. an acting crowd
- 

**Solution:**

**Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** According to emergent-norm theory, crowds are:

- a. irrational and impulsive
- b. often misinterpreted and misdirected
- c. able to develop their own definition of the situation
- d. prone to criminal behavior

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

A boy throwing rocks during a demonstration might be an example of \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. structural conduciveness
- b. structural strain
- c. precipitating factors
- d. mobilization for action

---

**Solution:**

**Answer**

C

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Discuss the differences between a mass and a crowd. What is an example of each? What sets them apart? What do they share in common?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Can you think of a time when your behavior in a crowd was dictated by the circumstances? Give an example of emergent-norm perspective, using your own experience.

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Discuss the differences between an acting crowd and a collective crowd. Give examples of each.

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Imagine you are at a rally protesting nuclear energy use. Walk us through the hypothetical rally using the value-added theory, imagining it meets all the stages.

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## **Glossary**

acting crowds

crowds of people who are focused on a specific action or goal

assembling perspective

a theory that credits individuals in crowds as behaving as rational thinkers and views crowds as engaging in purposeful behavior and collective action

casual crowds

people who share close proximity without really interacting

collective behavior

a noninstitutionalized activity in which several people voluntarily engage

conventional crowds

people who come together for a regularly scheduled event

crowd

a fairly large number of people who share close proximity

emergent norm theory

a perspective that emphasizes the importance of social norms in crowd behavior

expressive crowds

crowds who share opportunities to express emotions

flash mob

a large group of people who gather together in a spontaneous activity that lasts a limited amount of time

mass

a relatively large group with a common interest, even if they may not be in close proximity

public

an unorganized, relatively diffuse group of people who share ideas

value-added theory

a functionalist perspective theory that posits that several preconditions must be in place for collective behavior to occur

## Social Movements

- Demonstrate awareness of social movements on a state, national, and global level
- Distinguish between different types of social movements
- Identify stages of social movements
- Discuss theoretical perspectives on social movements, like resource mobilization, framing, and new social movement theory

**Social movements** are purposeful, organized groups that strive to work toward a common social goal. While most of us learned about social movements in history classes, we tend to take for granted the fundamental changes they caused—and we may be completely unfamiliar with the trend toward global social movements. But from the antitobacco movement that has worked to outlaw smoking in public buildings and raise the cost of cigarettes, to political uprisings throughout the Arab world, movements are creating social change on a global scale.

## Levels of Social Movements

Movements happen in our towns, in our nation, and around the world. Let's take a look at examples of social movements, from local to global. No doubt you can think of others on all of these levels, especially since modern technology has allowed us a near-constant stream of information about the quest for social change around the world.

### Local

Chicago is a city of highs and lows, from corrupt politicians and failing schools to innovative education programs and a thriving arts scene. Not surprisingly, it has been home to a number of social movements over time. Currently, AREA Chicago is a social movement focused on “building a socially just city” (AREA Chicago 2011). The organization seeks to “create relationships and sustain community through art, research, education, and activism” (AREA Chicago 2011). The movement offers online tools like the Radicalendar—a calendar for getting radical and connected—and events

such as an alternative to the traditional Independence Day picnic. Through its offerings, AREA Chicago gives local residents a chance to engage in a movement to help build a socially just city.

## State



Texas Secede! is an organization which would like Texas to secede from the United States. (Photo courtesy of Tim Pearce/flickr)

At the other end of the political spectrum from AREA Chicago is the Texas Secede! social movement in Texas. This statewide organization promotes the idea that Texas can and should secede from the United States to become an independent republic. The organization, which as of 2014 has over 6,000 “likes” on Facebook, references both Texas and national history in promoting secession. The movement encourages Texans to return to their rugged and individualistic roots, and to stand up to what proponents believe is the theft of their rights and property by the U.S. government (Texas Secede! 2009).

## **National**

A polarizing national issue that has helped spawn many activist groups is gay marriage. While the legal battle is being played out state by state, the issue is a national one.

The Human Rights Campaign, a nationwide organization that advocates for LGBT civil rights, has been active for over thirty years and claims more than a million members. One focus of the organization is its Americans for Marriage Equality campaign. Using public celebrities such as athletes, musicians, and political figures, it seeks to engage the public in the issue of equal rights under the law. The campaign raises awareness of the over 1,100 different rights, benefits, and protections provided on the basis of marital status under federal law and seeks to educate the public about why these protections should be available to all committed couples regardless of gender (Human Rights Campaign 2014).

A movement on the opposite end is the National Organization for Marriage, an organization that funds campaigns to stop same-sex marriage (National Organization for Marriage 2014). Both these organizations work on the national stage and seek to engage people through grassroots efforts to push their message. In February 2011, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder released a statement saying President Barack Obama had concluded that “due to a number of factors, including a documented history of discrimination, classification based on sexual orientation should be subject to a more heightened standard of scrutiny.” The statement said, “Section 3 of DOMA [the Defense of Marriage Act of 1993], as applied to legally married same-sex couples, fails to meet that standard and is therefore unconstitutional.” With that the Department was instructed not to defend the statute in such cases (Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs 2011; AP/Huffington Post 2011).





At the time of this writing, more than thirty states and the District of Columbia allow marriage for same-sex couples. State constitutional bans are more difficult to overturn than mere state bans because of the higher threshold of votes required to change a constitution. Now that the Supreme Court has stricken a key part of the Defense of Marriage Act, same-sex couples married in states that allow it are now entitled to federal benefits afforded to heterosexual couples (CNN 2014). (Photo courtesy of Jose Antonio Navas/flickr).

## Global

Social organizations worldwide take stands on such general areas of concern as poverty, sex trafficking, and the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in food. **Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)** are sometimes formed to support such movements, such as the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM). Global efforts to reduce poverty are represented by the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM), among others. The Fair Trade movement exists to protect and support food producers in developing countries. Occupy Wall Street, although initially a local movement, also went global throughout Europe and, as the chapter's introductory photo shows, the Middle East.

## Types of Social Movements

We know that social movements can occur on the local, national, or even global stage. Are there other patterns or classifications that can help us understand them? Sociologist David Aberle (1966) addresses this question by developing categories that distinguish among social movements based on what they want to change and how much change they want. **Reform movements** seek to change something specific about the social structure. Examples include antinuclear groups, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), the Dreamers movement for immigration reform, and the Human Rights Campaign's advocacy for Marriage Equality. **Revolutionary movements** seek to completely change every aspect of society. These include the 1960s counterculture movement, including the revolutionary group The Weather Underground, as well as anarchist collectives. Texas Secede! is a revolutionary movement. **Religious/Redemptive movements** are "meaning seeking," and their goal is to provoke inner change or spiritual growth in individuals. Organizations pushing these movements include Heaven's Gate or the Branch Davidians. The latter is still in existence despite government involvement that led to the deaths of numerous Branch Davidian members in 1993. **Alternative movements** are focused on self-improvement and limited, specific changes to individual beliefs and behavior. These include trends like transcendental meditation or a macrobiotic diet. **Resistance movements** seek to prevent or undo change

to the social structure. The Ku Klux Klan, the Minutemen, and pro-life movements fall into this category.

## Stages of Social Movements

Later sociologists studied the lifecycle of social movements—how they emerge, grow, and in some cases, die out. Blumer (1969) and Tilly (1978) outline a four-stage process. In the *preliminary stage*, people become aware of an issue, and leaders emerge. This is followed by the *coalescence stage* when people join together and organize in order to publicize the issue and raise awareness. In the *institutionalization stage*, the movement no longer requires grassroots volunteerism: it is an established organization, typically with a paid staff. When people fall away and adopt a new movement, the movement successfully brings about the change it sought, or when people no longer take the issue seriously, the movement falls into the *decline stage*. Each social movement discussed earlier belongs in one of these four stages. Where would you put them on the list?

### Note:

#### Social Media and Social Change: A Match Made in Heaven



In 2008, Obama's campaign used social media to tweet, like, and friend its way to victory.

(Photo courtesy of  
bradleyolin/flickr)

Chances are you have been asked to tweet, friend, like, or donate online for a cause. Maybe you were one of the many people who, in 2010, helped raise over \$3 million in relief efforts for Haiti through cell phone text donations. Or maybe you follow presidential candidates on Twitter and retweet their messages to your followers. Perhaps you have “liked” a local nonprofit on Facebook, prompted by one of your neighbors or friends liking it too. Nowadays, social movements are woven throughout our social media activities. After all, social movements start by activating people.

Referring to the ideal type stages discussed above, you can see that social media has the potential to dramatically transform how people get involved. Look at stage one, the *preliminary stage*: people become aware of an issue, and leaders emerge. Imagine how social media speeds up this step.

Suddenly, a shrewd user of Twitter can alert his thousands of followers about an emerging cause or an issue on his mind. Issue awareness can spread at the speed of a click, with thousands of people across the globe becoming informed at the same time. In a similar vein, those who are savvy and engaged with social media emerge as leaders. Suddenly, you don’t need to be a powerful public speaker. You don’t even need to leave your house. You can build an audience through social media without ever meeting the people you are inspiring.

At the next stage, the *coalescence stage*, social media also is transformative. Coalescence is the point when people join together to publicize the issue and get organized. President Obama’s 2008 campaign was a case study in organizing through social media. Using Twitter and other online tools, the campaign engaged volunteers who had typically not bothered with politics and empowered those who were more active to generate still more activity. It is no coincidence that Obama’s earlier work experience included grassroots community organizing. What is the difference between his campaign and the work he did in Chicago neighborhoods decades earlier? The ability to organize without regard to geographical boundaries by using social media. In 2009, when student protests erupted in Tehran, social media was considered so important to the organizing effort that the U.S. State Department actually asked Twitter to

suspend scheduled maintenance so that a vital tool would not be disabled during the demonstrations.

So what is the real impact of this technology on the world? Did Twitter bring down Mubarak in Egypt? Author Malcolm Gladwell (2010) doesn't think so. In an article in *New Yorker* magazine, Gladwell tackles what he considers the myth that social media gets people more engaged. He points out that most of the tweets relating to the Iran protests were in English and sent from Western accounts (instead of people on the ground). Rather than increasing engagement, he contends that social media only increases participation; after all, the cost of participation is so much lower than the cost of engagement. Instead of risking being arrested, shot with rubber bullets, or sprayed with fire hoses, social media activists can click "like" or retweet a message from the comfort and safety of their desk (Gladwell 2010).

There are, though, good cases to be made for the power of social media in propelling social movements. In the article, "Parrhesia and Democracy: Truth-telling, WikiLeaks and the Arab Spring," Theresa Sauter and Gavin Kendall (2011) describe the importance of social media in the Arab Spring uprisings. Parrhesia means "the practice of truth-telling," which describes the protestors' use of social media to make up for the lack of coverage and even misrepresentation of events by state-controlled media. The Tunisian blogger Lina Ben Mhenni posted photographs and videos on Facebook and Twitter of events exposing the violence committed by the government. In Egypt the journalist Asmaa Mahfouz used Facebook to gather large numbers of people in Tahrir Square in the capital city of Cairo. Sauter and Kendall maintain that it was the use of Web 2.0 technologies that allowed activists not only to share events with the world but also to organize the actions.

When the Egyptian government shut down the Internet to stop the use of social media, the group Anonymous, a hacking organization noted for online acts of civil disobedience initiated "Operation Egypt" and sent thousands of faxes to keep the public informed of their government's activities (CBS Interactive Inc. 2014) as well as attacking the government's web site (Wagensiel 2011). In its Facebook press release the group stated the following: "Anonymous wants you to offer free access to uncensored media in your entire country. When you ignore this message, not only will we attack your government websites, Anonymous will also make sure that

the international media sees the horrid reality you impose upon your people."

Sociologists have identified high-risk activism, such as the civil rights movement, as a "strong-tie" phenomenon, meaning that people are far more likely to stay engaged and not run home to safety if they have close friends who are also engaged. The people who dropped out of the movement—who went home after the danger got too great—did not display any less ideological commitment. But they lacked the strong-tie connection to other people who were staying. Social media, by its very makeup, is "weak-tie" (McAdam and Paulsen 1993). People follow or friend people they have never met. But while these online acquaintances are a source of information and inspiration, the lack of engaged personal contact limits the level of risk we'll take on their behalf.



Donation Update: Over \$21 Million in ☆  
\$10 donations raised for the people of  
#Haiti through the @RedCross text  
HAITI to 90999 campaign.



After a devastating earthquake  
in 2010, Twitter and the Red  
Cross raised millions for Haiti  
relief efforts through phone  
donations alone. (Photo  
courtesy of  
Cambodia4KidsOrg/flickr)

## Theoretical Perspectives on Social Movements

Most theories of social movements are called collective action theories, indicating the purposeful nature of this form of collective behavior. The following three theories are but a few of the many classic and modern theories developed by social scientists.

## **Resource Mobilization**

McCarthy and Zald (1977) conceptualize **resource mobilization theory** as a way to explain movement success in terms of the ability to acquire resources and mobilize individuals. Resources are primarily time and money, and the more of both, the greater the power of organized movements. Numbers of social movement organizations (SMOs), which are single social movement groups, with the same goals constitute a social movement industry (SMI). Together they create what McCarthy and Zald (1977) refer to as "the sum of all social movements in a society."

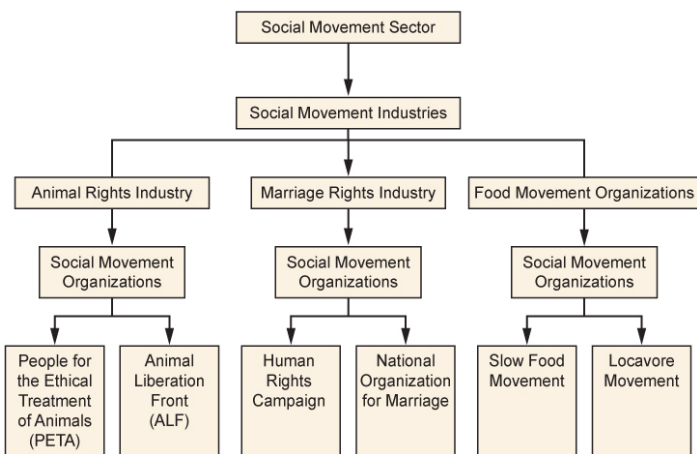
### **Resource Mobilization and the Civil Rights Movement**

An example of resource mobilization theory is activity of the civil rights movement in the decade between the mid 1950s and the mid 1960s. Social movements had existed before, notably the Women's Suffrage Movement and a long line of labor movements, thus constituting an **existing social movement sector**, which is the multiple social movement industries in a society, even if they have widely varying constituents and goals. The civil rights movement had also existed well before Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man. Less known is that Parks was a member of the NAACP and trained in leadership (A&E Television Networks, LLC. 2014). But her action that day was spontaneous and unplanned (Schmitz 2014). Her arrest triggered a public outcry that led to the famous Montgomery bus boycott, turning the movement into what we now think of as the "civil rights movement" (Schmitz 2014).

Mobilization had to begin immediately. Boycotting the bus made other means of transportation necessary, which was provided through car pools. Churches and their ministers joined the struggle, and the protest

organization In Friendship was formed as well as The Friendly Club and the Club From Nowhere. A **social movement industry**, which is the collection of the social movement organizations that are striving toward similar goals, was growing.

Martin Luther King Jr. emerged during these events to become the charismatic leader of the movement, gained respect from elites in the federal government, and aided by even more emerging SMOs such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), among others. Several still exist today. Although the movement in that period was an overall success, and laws were changed (even if not attitudes), the "movement" continues. So do struggles to keep the gains that were made, even as the U.S. Supreme Court has recently weakened the Voter Rights Act of 1965, once again making it more difficult for black Americans and other minorities to vote.



Multiple social movement organizations concerned about the same issue form a social movement industry. A society's many social movement industries comprise its social movement sector. With so many



options, to whom will you give your  
time and money?

## **Framing/Frame Analysis**

Over the past several decades, sociologists have developed the concept of frames to explain how individuals identify and understand social events and which norms they should follow in any given situation (Goffman 1974; Snow et al. 1986; Benford and Snow 2000). Imagine entering a restaurant. Your “frame” immediately provides you with a behavior template. It probably does not occur to you to wear pajamas to a fine-dining establishment, throw food at other patrons, or spit your drink onto the table. However, eating food at a sleepover pizza party provides you with an entirely different behavior template. It might be perfectly acceptable to eat in your pajamas and maybe even throw popcorn at others or guzzle drinks from cans.

Successful social movements use three kinds of frames (Snow and Benford 1988) to further their goals. The first type, **diagnostic framing**, states the problem in a clear, easily understood way. When applying diagnostic frames, there are no shades of gray: instead, there is the belief that what “they” do is wrong and this is how “we” will fix it. The anti-gay marriage movement is an example of diagnostic framing with its uncompromising insistence that marriage is only between a man and a woman. **Prognostic framing**, the second type, offers a solution and states how it will be implemented. Some examples of this frame, when looking at the issue of marriage equality as framed by the anti-gay marriage movement, include the plan to restrict marriage to “one man/one woman” or to allow only “civil unions” instead of marriages. As you can see, there may be many competing prognostic frames even within social movements adhering to similar diagnostic frames. Finally, **motivational framing** is the call to action: what should you do once you agree with the diagnostic frame and believe in the prognostic frame? These frames are action-oriented. In the gay marriage movement, a call to action might encourage you to vote “no” on Proposition 8 in California (a move to limit marriage to male-female

couples), or conversely, to contact your local congressperson to express your viewpoint that marriage should be restricted to male-female couples.

With so many similar diagnostic frames, some groups find it best to join together to maximize their impact. When social movements link their goals to the goals of other social movements and merge into a single group, a **frame alignment process** (Snow et al. 1986) occurs—an ongoing and intentional means of recruiting participants to the movement.

This frame alignment process has four aspects: bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation. *Bridging* describes a “bridge” that connects uninvolved individuals and unorganized or ineffective groups with social movements that, though structurally unconnected, nonetheless share similar interests or goals. These organizations join together to create a new, stronger social movement organization. Can you think of examples of different organizations with a similar goal that have banded together?

In the *amplification* model, organizations seek to expand their core ideas to gain a wider, more universal appeal. By expanding their ideas to include a broader range, they can mobilize more people for their cause. For example, the Slow Food movement extends its arguments in support of local food to encompass reduced energy consumption, pollution, obesity from eating more healthfully, and more.

In *extension*, social movements agree to mutually promote each other, even when the two social movement organization’s goals don’t necessarily relate to each other’s immediate goals. This often occurs when organizations are sympathetic to each others’ causes, even if they are not directly aligned, such as women’s equal rights and the civil rights movement.

Extension occurs when social movements have sympathetic causes. Women’s rights, racial equality, and LGBT advocacy are all human rights issues. (Photos (a) and (b) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; Photo (c) courtesy of Charlie Nguyen/flickr)



*Transformation* means a complete revision of goals. Once a movement has succeeded, it risks losing relevance. If it wants to remain active, the movement has to change with the transformation or risk becoming obsolete. For instance, when the women's suffrage movement gained women the right to vote, members turned their attention to advocating equal rights and campaigning to elect women to office. In short, transformation is an evolution in the existing diagnostic or prognostic frames that generally achieves a total conversion of the movement.

## **New Social Movement Theory**

**New social movement theory**, a development of European social scientists in the 1950s and 1960s, attempts to explain the proliferation of postindustrial and postmodern movements that are difficult to analyze using traditional social movement theories. Rather than being one specific theory, it is more of a perspective that revolves around understanding movements as they relate to politics, identity, culture, and social change. Some of these more complex interrelated movements include ecofeminism, which focuses on the patriarchal society as the source of environmental problems, and the transgender rights movement. Sociologist Steven Buechler (2000) suggests that we should be looking at the bigger picture in which these movements arise—shifting to a macro-level, global analysis of social movements.

### **The Movement to Legalize Marijuana**

The early history of marijuana in the United States includes its use as an over-the-counter medicine as well as various industrial applications. Its recreational use eventually became a focus of regulatory concern. Public opinion, swayed by a powerful propaganda campaign by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics in the 1930s, remained firmly opposed to the use of marijuana for decades. In the 1936 church-financed propaganda film "Reefer Madness," marijuana was portrayed as a dangerous drug that caused insanity and violent behavior.

One reason for the recent shift in public attitudes about marijuana, and the social movement pushing for its decriminalization, is a more-informed understanding of its effects that largely contradict its earlier characterization. The public has also become aware that penalties for possession have been significantly disproportionate along racial lines. U.S. Census and FBI data reveal that blacks in the United States are between two to eight times more likely than whites to be arrested for possession of marijuana (Urbina 2013; Matthews 2013). Further, the resulting incarceration costs and prison overcrowding are causing states to look closely at decriminalization and legalization.

In 2012, marijuana was legalized for recreational purposes in Washington and Colorado through ballot initiatives approved by voters. While it

remains a Schedule One controlled substance under federal law, the federal government has indicated that it will not intervene in state decisions to ease marijuana laws.

## Summary

Social movements are purposeful, organized groups, either with the goal of pushing toward change, giving political voice to those without it, or gathering for some other common purpose. Social movements intersect with environmental changes, technological innovations, and other external factors to create social change. There are a myriad of catalysts that create social movements, and the reasons that people join are as varied as the participants themselves. Sociologists look at both the macro- and microanalytical reasons that social movements occur, take root, and ultimately succeed or fail.

## Section Quiz

### Exercise:

#### Problem:

If we divide social movements according to their positions among all social movements in a society, we are using the \_\_\_\_\_ theory to understand social movements.

- a. framing
- b. new social movement
- c. resource mobilization
- d. value-added

---

#### Solution:

#### Answer

C

### Exercise:

**Problem:**

While PETA is a social movement organization, taken together, the animal rights social movement organizations PETA, ALF, and Greenpeace are a \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. social movement industry
- b. social movement sector
- c. social movement party
- d. social industry

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:** Social movements are:

- a. disruptive and chaotic challenges to the government
- b. ineffective mass movements
- c. the collective action of individuals working together in an attempt to establish new norms beliefs, or values
- d. the singular activities of a collection of groups working to challenge the status quo

---

**Solution:****Answer**

C

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

When the League of Women Voters successfully achieved its goal of women being allowed to vote, they had to undergo frame \_\_\_\_\_, a means of completely changing their goals to ensure continuing relevance.

- a. extension
- b. amplification
- c. bridging
- d. transformation

---

**Solution:****Answer**

D

**Exercise:****Problem:**

If a movement claims that the best way to reverse climate change is to reduce carbon emissions by outlawing privately owned cars, “outlawing cars” is the \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. prognostic framing
- b. diagnostic framing
- c. motivational framing
- d. frame transformation

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A

**Short Answer**

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Think about a social movement industry dealing with a cause that is important to you. How do the different social movement organizations of this industry seek to engage you? Which techniques do you respond to? Why?

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Do you think social media is an important tool in creating social change? Why, or why not? Defend your opinion.

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Describe a social movement in the decline stage. What is its issue? Why has it reached this stage?

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## **Glossary**

alternative movements

social movements that limit themselves to self-improvement changes in individuals

diagnostic framing

a the social problem that is stated in a clear, easily understood manner

frame alignment process

using bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation as an ongoing and intentional means of recruiting participants to a movement

motivational framing

a call to action

new social movement theory

a theory that attempts to explain the proliferation of postindustrial and postmodern movements that are difficult to understand using traditional social movement theories

NGO

nongovernmental organizations working globally for numerous humanitarian and environmental causes

prognostic framing

social movements that state a clear solution and a means of implementation

reform movements

movements that seek to change something specific about the social structure

religious/redemptive movements

movements that work to promote inner change or spiritual growth in individuals

resistance movements

those who seek to prevent or undo change to the social structure

resource mobilization theory

a theory that explains social movements' success in terms of their ability to acquire resources and mobilize individuals

revolutionary movements

movements that seek to completely change every aspect of society

social movement industry

the collection of the social movement organizations that are striving toward similar goals

social movement organization

a single social movement group

social movement sector

the multiple social movement industries in a society, even if they have widely varying constituents and goals

social movement

a purposeful organized group hoping to work toward a common social goal

## Social Change

- Explain how technology, social institutions, population, and the environment can bring about social change
- Discuss the importance of modernization in relation to social change

Collective behavior and social movements are just two of the forces driving **social change**, which is the change in society created through social movements as well as external factors like environmental shifts or technological innovations. Essentially, any disruptive shift in the status quo, be it intentional or random, human-caused or natural, can lead to social change. Below are some of the likely causes.

## Causes of Social Change

Changes to technology, social institutions, population, and the environment, alone or in some combination, create change. Below, we will discuss how these act as agents of social change, and we'll examine real-world examples. We will focus on four agents of change that social scientists recognize: technology, social institutions, population, and the environment.

### Technology

Some would say that improving technology has made our lives easier. Imagine what your day would be like without the Internet, the automobile, or electricity. In *The World Is Flat*, Thomas Friedman (2005) argues that technology is a driving force behind globalization, while the other forces of social change (social institutions, population, environment) play comparatively minor roles. He suggests that we can view globalization as occurring in three distinct periods. First, globalization was driven by military expansion, powered by horsepower and wind power. The countries best able to take advantage of these power sources expanded the most, and exert control over the politics of the globe from the late fifteenth century to around the year 1800. The second shorter period from approximately 1800 C.E. to 2000 C.E. consisted of a globalizing economy. Steam and rail power were the guiding forces of social change and globalization in this period.

Finally, Friedman brings us to the post-millennial era. In this period of globalization, change is driven by technology, particularly the Internet (Friedman 2005).

But also consider that technology can create change in the other three forces social scientists link to social change. Advances in medical technology allow otherwise infertile women to bear children, which indirectly leads to an increase in population. Advances in agricultural technology have allowed us to genetically alter and patent food products, which changes our environment in innumerable ways. From the way we educate children in the classroom to the way we grow the food we eat, technology has impacted all aspects of modern life.

Of course there are drawbacks. The increasing gap between the technological haves and have-nots—sometimes called the digital divide—occurs both locally and globally. Further, there are added security risks: the loss of privacy, the risk of total system failure (like the Y2K panic at the turn of the millennium), and the added vulnerability created by technological dependence. Think about the technology that goes into keeping nuclear power plants running safely and securely. What happens if an earthquake or other disaster, like in the case of Japan's Fukushima plant, causes the technology to malfunction, not to mention the possibility of a systematic attack to our nation's relatively vulnerable technological infrastructure?

**Note:**

**Crowdsourcing: Using the Web to Get Things Done**

Millions of people today walk around with their heads tilted toward a small device held in their hands. Perhaps you are reading this textbook on a phone or tablet. People in developed societies now take communication technology for granted. How has this technology affected social change in our society and others? One very positive way is crowdsourcing.

Thanks to the web, digital **crowdsourcing** is the process of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people, and especially from an online community rather than from traditional employees or suppliers. Web-based companies such as

Kickstarter have been created precisely for the purposes of raising large amounts of money in a short period of time, notably by sidestepping the traditional financing process. This book, or virtual book, is the product of a kind of crowdsourcing effort. It has been written and reviewed by several authors in a variety of fields to give you free access to a large amount of data produced at a low cost. The largest example of crowdsourced data is Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia which is the result of thousands of volunteers adding and correcting material.

Perhaps the most striking use of crowdsourcing is disaster relief. By tracking tweets and e-mails and organizing the data in order of urgency and quantity, relief agencies can address the most urgent calls for help, such as for medical aid, food, shelter, or rescue. On January 12, 2010 a devastating earthquake hit the nation of Haiti. By January 25, a crisis map had been created from more than 2,500 incident reports, and more reports were added every day. The same technology was used to assist victims of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami in 2011.

## **The Darker Side of Technology: Electronic Aggression in the Information Age**

The U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) uses the term "electronic aggression" to describe "any type of harassment or bullying that occurs through e-mail, a chat room, instant messaging, a website (including blogs), or text messaging" (CDC, n.d.) We generally think of this as cyberbullying. A 2011 study by the U.S. Department of Education found that 27.8 percent of students aged twelve through eighteen reported experiencing bullying. From the same sample 9 percent specifically reported having been a victim of cyberbullying (Robers et al. 2013).

Cyberbullying represents a powerful change in modern society. William F. Ogburn (1922) might have been describing it nearly a century ago when he defined "cultural lag," which occurs when material culture precedes nonmaterial culture. That is, society may not fully comprehend all the consequences of a new technology and so may initially reject it (such as stem cell research) or embrace it, sometimes with unintended negative consequences (such as pollution).

Cyberbullying is a special feature of the Internet. Unique to electronic aggression is that it can happen twenty-four hours a day, every day; it can reach a child (or an adult) even though she or he might otherwise feel safe in a locked house. The messages and images may be posted anonymously and to a very wide audience, and they might even be impossible to trace. Finally, once posted, the texts and images are very hard to delete. Its effects range from the use of alcohol and drugs to lower self-esteem, health problems, and even suicide (CDC, n.d.).

**Note:**

**The Story of Megan Meier**

According to the Megan Meier Foundation web site (2014a), Megan Meier had a lifelong struggle with weight, attention deficit disorder, and depression. But then a sixteen-year-old boy named Josh Evans asked Megan, who was thirteen years old, to be friends on the social networking web site MySpace. The two began communicating online regularly, though they never met in person or spoke on the phone. Now Megan finally knew a boy who, she believed, really thought she was pretty.

But things changed, according to the Megan Meier Foundation web site (2014b). Josh began saying he didn't want to be friends anymore, and the messages became cruel on October 16, 2006, when Josh concluded by telling Megan, "The world would be a better place without you." The cyberbullying escalated when additional classmates and friends on MySpace began writing disturbing messages and bulletins. That night Megan hanged herself in her bedroom closet, three weeks before what would have been her fourteenth birthday.

According to an ABC News article titled, "Parents: Cyber Bullying Led to Teen's Death" (2007), it was only later that a neighbor informed Megan's parents that Josh was not a real person. Instead, "Josh's" account was created by the mother of a girl who used to be friends with Megan.

You can find out more of Megan's story at her mother's web site:

<http://www.meganmeierfoundation.org/>

**Social Institutions**



Each change in a single social institution leads to changes in all social institutions. For example, the industrialization of society meant that there was no longer a need for large families to produce enough manual labor to run a farm. Further, new job opportunities were in close proximity to urban centers where living space was at a premium. The result is that the average family size shrunk significantly.

This same shift toward industrial corporate entities also changed the way we view government involvement in the private sector, created the global economy, provided new political platforms, and even spurred new religions and new forms of religious worship like Scientology. It has also informed the way we educate our children: originally schools were set up to accommodate an agricultural calendar so children could be home to work the fields in the summer, and even today, teaching models are largely based on preparing students for industrial jobs, despite that being an outdated need. A shift in one area, such as industrialization, means an interconnected impact across social institutions.

## **Population**

Population composition is changing at every level of society. Births increase in one nation and decrease in another. Some families delay childbirth while others start bringing children into their folds early. Population changes can be due to random external forces, like an epidemic, or shifts in other social institutions, as described above. But regardless of why and how it happens, population trends have a tremendous interrelated impact on all other aspects of society.

In the United States, we are experiencing an increase in our senior population as baby boomers begin to retire, which will in turn change the way many of our social institutions are organized. For example, there is an increased demand for housing in warmer climates, a massive shift in the need for elder care and assisted living facilities, and growing awareness of elder abuse. There is concern about labor shortages as boomers retire, not to mention the knowledge gap as the most senior and accomplished leaders in different sectors start to leave. Further, as this large generation leaves the

workforce, the loss of tax income and pressure on pension and retirement plans means that the financial stability of the country is threatened.

Globally, often the countries with the highest fertility rates are least able to absorb and attend to the needs of a growing population. Family planning is a large step in ensuring that families are not burdened with more children than they can care for. On a macro level, the increased population, particularly in the poorest parts of the globe, also leads to increased stress on the planet's resources.

## **The Environment**

Turning to human ecology, we know that individuals and the environment affect each other. As human populations move into more vulnerable areas, we see an increase in the number of people affected by natural disasters, and we see that human interaction with the environment increases the impact of those disasters. Part of this is simply the numbers: the more people there are on the planet, the more likely it is that some will be affected by a natural disaster.

But it goes beyond that. Movements like 350.org describe how we have already seen five extinctions of massive amounts of life on the planet, and the crisis of global change has put us on the verge of yet another. According to their website, "The number 350 means climate safety: to preserve a livable planet, scientists tell us we must reduce the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere from its current level of 400 parts per million to below 350 ppm" (350.org).

The environment is best described as an ecosystem, one that exists as the interplay of multiple parts including 8.7 million species of life. However dozens of species are going extinct every day, a number 1,000 times to 10,000 times the normal "background rate" and the highest rate since the dinosaurs disappeared 65 million years ago. The Center for Biological Diversity states that this extinction crisis, unlike previous ones caused by natural disasters, is "caused almost entirely by us" (Center for Biological Diversity, n.d.). The growth of the human population, currently over seven

billion and expected to rise to nine or ten billion by 2050, perfectly correlates with the rising extinction rate of life on earth.

**Note:**

**Hurricane Katrina: When It All Comes Together**

The four key elements that affect social change that are described in this chapter are the environment, technology, social institutions, and population. In 2005, New Orleans was struck by a devastating hurricane. But it was not just the hurricane that was disastrous. It was the converging of all four of these elements, and the text below will connect the elements by putting the words in parentheses.

Before Hurricane Katrina (environment) hit, poorly coordinated evacuation efforts had left about 25 percent of the population, almost entirely African Americans who lacked private transportation, to suffer the consequences of the coming storm (demographics). Then "after the storm, when the levees broke, thousands more [refugees] came. And the city buses, meant to take them to proper shelters, were underwater" (Sullivan 2005). No public transportation was provided, drinking water and communications were delayed, and FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (institutions), was headed by an appointee with no real experience in emergency management. Those who were eventually evacuated did not know where they were being sent or how to contact family members. African Americans were sent the farthest from their homes. When the displaced began to return, public housing had not been reestablished, yet the Superdome stadium, which had served as a temporary disaster shelter, had been rebuilt. Homeowners received financial support, but renters did not.

As it turns out, it was not entirely the hurricane that cost the lives of 1,500 people, but the fact that the city's storm levees (technology), which had been built too low and which failed to meet numerous other safety specifications, gave way, flooding the lower portions of the city, occupied almost entirely by African Americans.

Journalist Naomi Klein, in her book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, presents a theory of a "triple shock," consisting of an initial disaster, an economic shock that replaces public services with

private (for-profit) ones, and a third shock consisting of the intense policing of the remaining public. Klein supports her claim by quoting then-Congressman Richard Baker as saying, "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did." She quotes developer Joseph Canizaro as stating, "I think we have a clean sheet to start again. And with that clean sheet we have some very big opportunities." One clean sheet was that New Orleans began to replace public schools with charters, breaking the teachers' union and firing all public school teachers (Mullins 2014). Public housing was seriously reduced and the poor were forced out altogether or into the suburbs far from medical and other facilities (The Advocate 2013). Finally, by relocating African Americans and changing the ratio of African Americans to whites, New Orleans changed its entire demographic makeup.

## **Modernization**

**Modernization** describes the processes that increase the amount of specialization and differentiation of structure in societies resulting in the move from an undeveloped society to a developed, technologically driven society (Irwin 1975). By this definition, the level of modernity within a society is judged by the sophistication of its technology, particularly as it relates to infrastructure, industry, and the like. However, it is important to note the inherent ethnocentric bias of such assessment. Why do we assume that those living in semi-peripheral and peripheral nations would find it so wonderful to become more like the core nations? Is modernization always positive?

One contradiction of all kinds of technology is that they often promise time-saving benefits, but somehow fail to deliver. How many times have you ground your teeth in frustration at an Internet site that refused to load or at a dropped call on your cell phone? Despite time-saving devices such as dishwashers, washing machines, and, now, remote control vacuum cleaners, the average amount of time spent on housework is the same today as it was fifty years ago. And the dubious benefits of 24/7 e-mail and immediate information have simply increased the amount of time employees are

expected to be responsive and available. While once businesses had to travel at the speed of the U.S. postal system, sending something off and waiting until it was received before the next stage, today the immediacy of information transfer means there are no such breaks.

Further, the Internet bought us information, but at a cost. The morass of information means that there is as much poor information available as trustworthy sources. There is a delicate line to walk when core nations seek to bring the assumed benefits of modernization to more traditional cultures. For one, there are obvious procapitalist biases that go into such attempts, and it is short-sighted for western governments and social scientists to assume all other countries aspire to follow in their footsteps. Additionally, there can be a kind of neo-liberal defense of rural cultures, ignoring the often crushing poverty and diseases that exist in peripheral nations and focusing only on a nostalgic mythology of the happy peasant. It takes a very careful hand to understand both the need for cultural identity and preservation as well as the hopes for future growth.

## **Summary**

There are numerous and varied causes of social change. Four common causes, as recognized by social scientists, are technology, social institutions, population, and the environment. All four of these areas can impact when and how society changes. And they are all interrelated: a change in one area can lead to changes throughout. Modernization is a typical result of social change. Modernization refers to the process of increased differentiation and specialization within a society, particularly around its industry and infrastructure. While this assumes that more modern societies are better, there has been significant pushback on this western-centric view that all peripheral and semi-peripheral countries should aspire to be like North America and Western Europe.

## **Section Quiz**

### **Exercise:**

**Problem:**

Children in peripheral nations have little to no daily access to computers and the Internet, while children in core nations are constantly exposed to this technology. This is an example of:

- a. the digital divide
- b. human ecology
- c. modernization theory
- d. dependency theory

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A

**Exercise:****Problem:**

When sociologists think about technology as an agent of social change, which of the following is *not* an example?

- a. Population growth
- b. Medical advances
- c. The Internet
- d. Genetically engineered food

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

China is undergoing a shift in industry, increasing labor specialization and the amount of differentiation present in the social structure. This exemplifies:

- a. human ecology
- b. dependency theory
- c. modernization
- d. conflict perspective

---

**Solution:****Answer**

C

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Core nations that work to propel peripheral nations toward modernization need to be aware of:

- a. preserving peripheral nation cultural identity
- b. preparing for pitfalls that come with modernization
- c. avoiding hegemonistic assumptions about modernization
- d. all of the above

---

**Solution:****Answer**

D

**Exercise:**

**Problem:**

In addition to social movements, social change is also caused by technology, social institutions, population and \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. the environment
- b. modernization
- c. social structure
- d. new social movements

---

**Solution:****Answer**

A

**Short Answer****Exercise:****Problem:**

Consider one of the major social movements of the twentieth century, from civil rights in the United States to Gandhi's nonviolent protests in India. How would technology have changed it? Would change have come more quickly or more slowly? Defend your opinion.

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Discuss the digital divide in the context of modernization. Is there a real concern that poorer communities are lacking in technology? Why, or why not?

**Exercise:**



**Problem:**

Which theory do you think better explains the global economy: dependency theory (global inequity is due to the exploitation of peripheral and semi-peripheral nations by core nations) or modernization theory? Remember to justify your answer and provide specific examples.

**Exercise:****Problem:**

Do you think that modernization is good or bad? Explain, using examples.

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## **Glossary**

### crowdsourcing

the process of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting  
contributions from a large group of people

### modernization

the process that increases the amount of specialization and  
differentiation of structure in societies

### social change

the change in a society created through social movements as well as  
through external factors like environmental shifts or technological  
innovations